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EDITORIAL

Anti-Western Promoter Of the New Union

The formation of the Russia-Belarus Union has been in the works for nearly ten years, leading many analysts of the post-Soviet political scene to doubt that it will ever take place. Alternatively, the fervent supporters of Belarus' independence see in the integration process a growing danger of annexation, while the Russian nationalists see it as a means of restoring Russia's greatness. Recently, the Belarusian political analyst Vitali Silitski has called this drawn out, up-and-down process "a virtual integration of a sinusoidal nature" with rosy pronouncements invariably followed by quarrelsome denunciations.

Its 1996 ceremonial inauguration in the Kremlin by Yeltsin and Lukashenka was sealed by brotherly embraces and toasts of undying friendship. Soon afterwards, however, while Yeltsin was preoccupied with chaotic events in Moscow, Lukashenka was actively engaged in developing a solid grass roots support by frequently visiting Russia's neglected regions. There he very effectively played on the growing Soviet nostalgia by championing the restoration of the Soviet Union's past greatness. He promised to devote the energy of a 40 year old leader to that cause, compared to the blundering of an 80(sic) year old Yeltsin, who was then in his sixties. Subsequently, this lengthy virtual integration process has given ample speculative material to a variety of specialists on the post-Soviet scene. Both positive and negative aspects of such Union were widely discussed.

Authoritative Russian think tanks listed a number of advantages for Russia resulting from such a Union. In 1997 one such institution with close links to the Kremlin published an extensive study on the developments within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The study urged taking advantage of pro-Russian Lukashenka's stay in power to secure the Union as the first step in expanding Russian influence in the world. In 2002, Sergei Karaganov, the head of a semi-official think tank, declared: "The process of national self-identification, of independence, is developing in Belarus, and the sooner we put a stop to it, the cheaper it will be for Russia. And this (step) is essential in order for us to hold onto the Kaliningrad oblast." And finally, Belarus serves well as the site of many Russian military bases, including newly placed early warning systems.

Serious disadvantages were raised as well. The unreformed Belarusian economy might end up being a substantial burden for Russia for a long time. So will the almost total state control of Belarusian industry, and the authoritarian form of government. Both were very different (until recently) from the fledgling democracy of Russia.

The latest evaluations of the integration process generally reach a conclusion that Lukashenka is determined to maintain Belarusian sovereignty while extracting maximal advantages from Russia, now fearful of yet another 'color' revolution on its periphery.

Such a conclusion is believed to be flawed because it does not take into account the internal situation in Belarus. Most of the comparative cost-benefit analysis has been done only with Russia in mind. And more importantly, the analysts do not take into account Lukashenka's driving ambition to be the restorer of the Soviet state, or the builder of a new Russian-dominated and virulently anti Western Slavic power. With all his unpredictability, Lukashenka has consistently been a promoter of all things Russian, including a union with Russia. To that end he has established strict authoritarian control of Belarus, in order to have it in place as a dependable power base in advancing his plans for a role on the Russian stage, whether it be around the end of Putin's term in office in 2008, or during some future chaos in Russia, one possibly triggered by a drop in world oil prices.

Lukashenka's destruction of all aspects of Belarusian cultural identity serves to establish a state that will soon become Belarusian in name only, and thus more easily integrated into Greater Russia. The russification campaign now exceeds anything experienced during the Soviet times. It started immediately after his election by reducing the status of the Belarusian language, followed by eliminating it from the media, and effectively from the overall educational system. The fraudulent referendum of 2004 allows Lukashenka to run again in 2006, and if necessary, five years later, all the while tightening his control on the country, waiting for the right opportunity to exert his anti Western influence in Russian affairs.

If the world's democracies are interested in preventing such future Russian expansionism with everything that it might entail, it behooves them to prevent the first expansion from taking place, namely the absorption of Belarus, whether it be economic or territorial. To accomplish that, both the European states and the United States need **to focus on undoing all of Lukashenka-imposed political, economic and ideological controls and providing essential support for the cultural revival of the Belarusian nation and its return to democracy.**

Walter Stankievich

Presidential Elections – March 19, 2006

Alexander Lukashenka met with Russian President Putin on December 15 in Sochi where he reportedly received Putin's assurances of support based on undisclosed conditions. The next day, in an extraordinary session, the handpicked Belarusian Assembly unanimously approved the proposed date of March 19, 2006 for the Presidential election.

In accordance with existing electoral law, that leaves exactly one week for interested groups or parties to submit lists of their 'initiative groups' which must contain at least 100 persons. These groups' task is to collect at least 100,000 signatures of voters in support of their candidate within 35 days, or by January 27, 2006.

By December 28, 2005 the formation of Oblast and Rayon electoral commissions must be completed, and by the end of January, over 6,000 District commissions. *(In past elections, the democratic opposition groups invariably learned that all seats on the various commissions have already been filled by 'experienced' persons.)*

By mid February the formal registration of Presidential candidates should be completed. *(The registered candidates will be those who survive the rigorous, and practically unappealable signature validation process.)* Early voting will start 5 days before the election, or on March 14. *(It is during this largely un-monitored process that most of the abuses take place.)*

In the view of some political analysts, a referendum on the formation of the Russia-Belarus Union will be announced shortly before, in order to coincide with the presidential election. It may follow a scenario similar to the one around the parliamentary elections of 2004, which allowed Lukashenka to run unlimited number of times.

From the Publisher

The few remaining freedoms in Belarus will be practically eliminated with the application of the changes to the Criminal Code.

"The Bill will effectively criminalize criticism of the government and throw Belarus into the dark days of Stalinism," stated Ann Cooper, the Executive Director of Committee to Protect Journalists.

In an extensive Congressional Record statement, Congressman Chris Smith, the Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, reviews the gradual elimination of human rights and freedoms in Belarus, culminating in the enactment of the draconian changes to the Criminal Code. He concluded: **"I urge the Bush administration to step up efforts to break Lukashenka regime's near monopoly over the country's information space and provide timely assistance to democracy forces in Belarus."**

With nearly total control exerted by the dictatorship in Belarus, it is important to intensify all outside media efforts, whether it be satellite TV, AM and FM radio, the Internet and printed publications. Our publication, both in hard copy and on-line in English, and soon in Belarusian, needs to join in this all out effort.

Support us in the endeavor to expand BR's reach by finding new readers, subscribers, authors and contributors!

FEATURES

Riding Roughshod Over Rights in Belarus:

Statement in the U.S. Congress by Rep. Christopher H. Smith

Mr. Speaker, as Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission and the sponsor of the Belarus Democracy Act, I remain deeply concerned about the violations of human rights occurring every day in Lukashenka's Belarus.

During a recent news conference, the autocratic Belarusian leader expressed confidence in his victory in the presidential election scheduled for next year, rhetorically asking why should he be rigging this election. Given his intensified assault on civil society, his dismal human rights record, and penchant for rigged elections, Mr. Lukashenka's statements ring hollow. Yet, Lukashenka's actions against democratic forces, non-governmental organizations and the independent media belie his stated confidence regarding electoral victory.



Rep. Christopher H. Smith

Last week, the lower chamber of Lukashenka's pocket parliament passed a law endorsing tougher new penalties for activities "directed against people and public security," a proposal submitted to the parliament only days before passage. These changes to the Criminal Code increase penalties for participation in organizations that were liquidated or warned to stop their pro-democratic activities, or for the training and other preparations for unauthorized demonstrations or other civic actions.

Mr. Speaker, to cite just one of the draconian provisions, the Code now gives authorities the leeway to jail an individual for up to two years for "providing a foreign country, a foreign or international organization with patently false information about the political, economic, social, military, and international situation of the Republic of Belarus." Putting aside the matter of such a provision violating free speech norms, if the past is any guide, it is clear who would be the arbiter of what constitutes "false information." There can be no doubt that the law aims to stifle the democratic opposition, and the head of the KGB (yes, in Belarus it is still called the KGB) himself recently admitted that the reasons for the law is to discourage street protests during the upcoming presidential race.

This law, while particularly blatant, is part and parcel of other actions designed to strengthen the regime's control and deny the Belarusian people any alternative voices as the presidential election campaign unfolds. Last month, a new law further controlling political parties came into force. A recent Council of Ministers decree clamps down on organizations that conduct public opinion polls. A Lukashenka decree further discriminates against independent trade unions, stipulating that only trade unions belonging to the pro-governmental federation are granted the right to premises at no cost. Yet another decree considerably limits students' opportunities to travel abroad.

Meanwhile, opposition activists are routinely beaten up or detained. Just last week, for instance, Ales Kalita was detained and at the hands of the police suffered a dislocated arm for merely distributing the independent newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*. Viktar Syrytsa, a lecturer at Baranavichi College was fired for organizing a meeting of students with presidential opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich. Belarusian State Economic University in Minsk expelled fourth-year student Tatsiana Khoma because she took a brief trip to France, where she was elected to the executive committee of the Brussels-based National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), an umbrella organization of 44 national student unions from 34 countries. The police beat activist Mikita Sasim. They detained youth activists Yauhen Afnagel and others. Other repressive actions include frequent arrests of activists of democratic youth movements such as ZUBR, a ban on worship by some religious congregations and other repressive actions against selected religious minorities, and continued harassment of members of the Union of Poles in Belarus.

Moreover, there is an emerging pattern of the regime putting obstacles in the way of Mr. Milinkevich. Recently, a public meeting in Babruisk with him was disrupted by the authorities, with participants being told by the authorities to go home and threatened with tax inspections. During a press conference, the electricity in the room cut off, as did a "hot-line" phone with town residents.

Especially egregious has been the regime's intensification of the war against the already repressed and struggling independent media. Newspaper closures, suspensions, threats, and exorbitant and absurd libel fines, pressures on advertisers and other forms of harassment have become routine. Outright police confiscations of independent newspapers are also not uncommon. A seemingly more subtle tactic, implemented just a few weeks ago, involved the decision by Belarus' monopoly state postal service to stop delivery to subscribers of a dozen private periodicals. Meanwhile, the suspicious murder in 2004 of journalist Veronika Charkasova has not been resolved. Authorities have refused to open a criminal investigation into journalist Vasil Hrodnikau's death. Lukashenka himself recently admitted to Russian journalists that his regime applies very serious pressure on the media, somewhat incongruously adding that "this does not mean I am crushing them."

Mr. Speaker, what I have cited is by no means an exhaustive list of abuses perpetrated by the Lukashenka regime, merely a sampling of the types of repressive actions employed on a daily basis by Europe's last dictator. As Helsinki Commission Co-Chair, I will continue to monitor closely and speak out forcefully regarding these and other violations of Belarus' freely undertaken OSCE commitments. I urge the Bush Administration to step up efforts to break the Lukashenka regime's near monopoly over the country's information space and provide timely assistance to pro-democracy forces in Belarus.

It is clear that Mr. Lukashenka and his minions are laying the groundwork for yet another un-free and unfair election - similar to the 2001 presidential elections and the 2000 and 2004 parliamentary elections - that will fall far short of OSCE standards. Lukashenka is once again showing that, despite his confident rhetoric, he fears his own people and profoundly fails to respect their dignity as citizens and as human beings.

Source: Charter' 97 Press Center, December 7, 2005

RESOLUTION
by the 25th Session of the *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic

November 5, 2005, New York

The Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, having considered the internal and international political situation regarding Belarus, resolves:

That despite the heroic efforts of Belarusian patriots, the threat to the independence of Belarus remains real. Moscow has been actively implementing a strategy of absorbing Belarus. Two years ago Russian president Putin proposed that Belarus should directly become a part of the Russian Federation. Although the Kremlin now leaves it to lower-ranking politicians to make this kind of declarations, still the plans of signing the so-called "Constitutional Act of the Union State" compel all the pro-independence forces in Belarus and abroad, as well as the international community, to regard the danger of Belarus' incorporation into Russia as an extremely serious matter.

These concerns are justified by the following facts:

• Kremlin has moved from rhetorical statements toward deepening its consistent policy of firmly securing Belarus within the sphere of the Russian military-industrial complex. Russia has drawn Belarus into a "single" system of air defence under Russian control, directed against the West. Russian military bases are stationed on Belarusian territory and are expanding;

• Belarus is being drawn into a so-called "single" customs and border-control system, and the "unification" of the two states' legislation in Belarus has been implemented in accordance with Russian interests. The plans to abolish Belarusian national currency and introduce the Russian rouble have not been cancelled, and neither the Kremlin nor the regime in power in Belarus question it in principle;

• Kremlin has consistently been blocking the attempts of the international community to compel the regime in Belarus to take steps towards democracy, the restoration of the norms of law and the consolidation of independence;

• assisting Moscow's aspirations, Lukashenka's regime has been destroying everything Belarusian in Belarus. The state TV and radio have been switched to the Russian language, Belarusian-language publications are being eliminated, writers of Belarusian national orientation are being deprived of the possibility of being published by state publishing houses. In many localities children are deprived of a possibility of education in Belarusian, since Belarusian-language classes have been disbanded. Russification in Belarus today is being carried out with an intensity unparalleled since the devastating policy of the Russian tsarist authorities in the 19th century.

Under these circumstances the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic:

• **draws** the attention of the leadership of European institutions, the governments and parliamentarians of the European countries, as well as of the USA and Canada, to the fact that achieving democracy in Belarus is impossible without securing the national rights of the Belarusian people, without preserving its national values, and its native Belarusian culture, of which the Belarusian language is a most important factor;

• **proclaims** that all the bilateral "integration" agreements concluded in the past, and those in the future between the anti-democratic and unconstitutional authority currently in Belarus and the Russian Federation, are void of legitimacy and legal standing. The participation of the current leader of the said authority in the upcoming presidential elections in Belarus has no constitutional basis either;

• **points out** that under these conditions the Belarusian diaspora has of necessity to play an increasingly prevalent role as the guardian of the Belarusian ideals of national statehood embodied in the Act of Independence of 25 March 1918. Unfortunately, this role has not yet been fully appreciated by some segments of the political community in Belarus. It is well understood, however, by Lukashenka's regime which has been attempting through its representatives to destroy Belarusian organisations abroad. This situation imposes great political and moral responsibility on the democratically oriented Belarusian diaspora.

The *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic remains the legitimate representative of the sovereign rights of the Belarusian people, expressed in the Act of 25 March 1918, and confirms its resolution to actively defend the Independence of Belarus in all ways possible and available.

HISTORICAL DATES

December 15, 1850

The birthdate of **Mikalaj Sudzilouski-Russell**, known as an activist in 19th century liberation movements, a scientist and doctor of medicine. He helped to organize Bulgarians' 1876 uprising against the Turkish rule. Lived and worked in Western Europe, USA, Hawaii. In 1900 elected a senator, and in 1901 the president of the Hawaiian Senate.

Alyaksandr vs. Alyaksandr

By Alyaksandr Kudrytski

In the end, it was undoubtedly the largest indoor gathering of the Belarusian regime's enemies in many years: on 1-2 October more than 800 opponents crowded the Palace of Culture in the gigantic state-owned MAZ industrial plant. An officially sanctioned meeting, let alone in such an imposing setting, had seemed deeply implausible until recently. Initially, the congress' organizers had received 54 refusals from potential hosts right across the country. When it became obvious that nobody would dare to harbor an opposition gathering, the opposition even contemplated heading to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv to hold the congress, at which they were to choose a single candidate to represent the united opposition in presidential elections in 2006.

Ironically, they struck lucky at the 55th attempt thanks to the man they want to unseat: President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Unexpectedly, during one of his TV appearances in September, Lukashenka urged the mayor of Minsk, Valery Paulau, to provide a building for the congress. In the blink of an eye, the congress's organizing committee had a "palace" at its disposal. Moreover, when the delegates arrived on 1 October, they found no police blocking their way. There was anti-opposition graffiti – "Glory to the [Soviet] Union, no to European Union!" and "No to the corrupt opposition!" – but the doormen equipped with James Bond-style wireless headsets were, like them, opposition supporters.

A UNITED FRONT ...

Quite why Lukashenka was willing to give the opposition such a prominent stage is unclear. Perhaps he wanted to claim democratic credentials for his regime. Or perhaps he hoped that the opposition would very publicly fail in its stated goal – to find a single candidate – and would instead display disunity.

Certainly, the members of the congress make up a varied group. Belarus' many political parties sent delegates, as too did non-governmental organizations. Officially, the former deputies of the first Belarusian parliament (including Lukashenka) and the deputies of a parliament dissolved by Lukashenka in 1997 were also invited, as well as the opposition activists who ran for parliament in 2003 but were not given a chance to win a seat because of massive election fraud. Among the delegates were also editors-in-chief of independent publications as well as a number of VIPs – stand-alone opposition politicians such as General Valery Fralou or Uladzimer Kolas, head of the Belarusian Lyceum, a deeply symbolic institution for Belarusian nationalists closed down by Lukashenka.

But the most important men at the congress – Lukashenka's four potential challengers – all stressed unity when they put their cases, standing below a big banner with a symbol of the congress: a red tree with its crown in the shape of a map of Belarus under a white sky, which (not coincidentally) are also the colors of the white-red-white national flag banned by Lukashenka.

Siarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Communist Party, said not a word about himself, concentrating instead on the im-

portance of uniting around a single candidate, whoever he might be.

Stanislau Shushkevich, former speaker of the parliament and one of the country's social-democrat leaders, won a long round of applause for withdrawing from the race.

Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, swore an oath on three books: the Bible, the Belarusian constitution of 1994, and a volume by Belarus' most famous writer, the late Vasil Bykau. Belarus could, he suggested, be "as prosperous as Norway and as neutral as Switzerland." By contrast, war was the keynote of the fourth candidate's speech. Alyaksandr Milinkevich, ex-deputy mayor of the western Belarusian city of Hrodna and a civil-society leader, said that next year's presidential elections would be "a war, a serious war."



Alyaksandr MILINKEVICH

The war, of course, was not to be within the opposition but to topple Lukashenka, and all four signed an agreement pledging to respect and support the choice of the congress, no matter who won most votes.

... BUT A SQUEAKY COALITION

But, for all the united front, the congress was anything but a meeting of like-minded politicians. Fralou insisted that the opposition should become more tolerant towards Russia. "I always associate the word 'nationalist' with the word 'fascist,' " he said, prompting boos from a fair majority of the delegates, used as they are to hearing the same equation made by Lukashenka.

Zmitsier Dashkevich, leader of the youth organization Malady Front, declared that his organization would support any candidate ... except a Communist. The Communist activist Valer Berazijenka retorted by stating that "screaming and waving the white-red-white flag will not deliver more votes to any candidate." The delegates reacted by chanting "Han'ba!" ("Shame!"). To smooth things over, the Communists' candidate Kalyakin (who happened to be wearing a red tie on a white shirt) intervened. "We should concentrate our efforts on bringing Belarus back to the path of democracy," he declared. "We are not strong enough to quarrel over matters that, though serious, are not vital at this point."

There was also a serious disagreement between Lyabedzka and Milinkevich about how the campaign should be run. Milinkevich stressed iron discipline, a highly centralized campaign team, and the candidate's "near-dictatorial authority" over the resources and activities of his team. Lyabedzka called for a very different organization, saying that the campaign should be coordinated by a special administrative body empowered by the congress, ensuring that all parties were able to contribute to the strategy.

EIGHT KEY VOTES

The vote itself highlighted a deep cleavage. Milinkevich fell just shy of the 50-percent majority needed for victory in the first round of voting, gaining 383 votes or 47.1 percent of the total. Lyabedzka trailed significantly behind, with 263 votes (32.3 percent), followed by the Communists' Kalyakin, with 152 votes (18.7 percent). Despite that commanding position, Milinkevich only narrowly won the second round, gaining 16 votes to take him to 399, while Lyabedzka added 128, to finish on 391.



Alyaksandr LUKASHENKA

This congress was called to instill a sense of solidarity among the rank and file of the various opposition groups with the memory of the 2001 presidential campaign still fresh. Four years ago there was widespread unhappiness when the opposition's single candidate, Uladzimir Hancharyk, was picked behind closed doors by the five would-be challengers. And a note of unity was again struck immediately after the result was announced. The delegates rose from their seats to chant "Zhyvie Belarus!" ("Long live Belarus!"). Milinkevich told delegates, "I do not believe that I am better than any of you at all. I do not call myself a winner. We are strong only when we are united." The runner-up, visibly worn out and disappointed, took up the theme. "I don't believe I have lost today," Lyabedzka said. "I could lose neither to Milinkevich, nor to Kalyakin, nor to Shushkevich. The only loss there can be is to Alyaksandr Lukashenka."

Still, despite the warm welcome, many delegates were disappointed with the outcome. Some in the ranks of Lyabedzka's party swiftly displayed their dissatisfaction. Concerned that the Milinkevich-affiliated network of NGOs would play first fiddle in the campaign, the United Civic Party`s Mogilev, Brest, and Minsk regional branches refused to throw their support behind the winner. The strength of the coalition was put to the test on 5 October, when Lyabedzka asked the party`s political council for a vote of confidence. If he failed, he promised to resign as party leader, a step that would have left the future of the opposition coalition uncertain. In the event, Lyabedzka won full support for himself and his desire to abide by the coalition agreement.

Milinkevich's first moves were conciliatory. He asked Kalyakin to supervise the campaign, and offered Lyabedzka the leadership of the committee tasked with formulating the united opposition's political strategy. He may be hoping to forestall a repeat of what happened in 2001, when many of those who worked for the early frontrunner to challenge Lukashenka, Syamion Domash, refused to work for the opposition's eventual candidate, the trade union leader Hancharyk. Milinkevich led Domash's campaign.

CHALLENGERS TO THE CHALLENGER

Much of the patchwork quilt of Belarus' political opposition can now be found in the coalition. Some patches, though, are still missing. If a truly united front is to be stitched together, more work needs to be done, as a number of politicians, such as Alyaksandr Vaytovich, former head of the upper chamber of the Belarusian parliament, and Belarusian Lyceum director Kolas, who also heads the Council of Intelligentsia, have promised to bid for the presidency if Milinkevich performs poorly.

Another source of worry for the coalition is Alyaksandr Kazulin, former rector of Belarusian State University and now head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada). His party members actively took part in the congress, but were given no instructions on how to vote. Some party members felt an affinity with the winner. Milinkevich "is closer to me thanks to his ideas, which are the ideas of Belarusian moderation," said Ales Shcharbak from the town of Shklou. "We don't need the aggression shown by Anatol Lyabedzka." Kazulin himself, however, did not attend the congress, instead going on a political fundraising tour abroad.

One man who will not join a united front is Zyanon Paznyak, perhaps Belarus' foremost leading communist-era dissident and once the leading light of the nationalist Belarusian People's Front. Now, though, he leads, from exile, only a splinter party – the Conservative-Christian Party of the Belarusian People's Front – and habitually expresses disgust at every opposition candidate and the whole coalition project. "The so-called democratic opposition was created with the help of Russian and German intelligence services," Paznyak asserted in an interview for RFE/RL. "This opposition is not based on national principles; it is Moscow-oriented." Paznyak promised to run for the presidency in 2006.

Few believe that the Kremlin, which has – like Lukashenka – frequently expressed concern at the possibility of another "color" revolution in the Soviet successor states following those in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, supports the opposition. There was, though, a Russian presence, in the form of Nikita Belykh, the new leader of the Russian liberal party Union of Right Forces. "Of course, our party has some personal sympathies, on which I would rather not elaborate" he told TOL, hinting at Lyabedzka, known in Russia as a liberal and a Russia-friendly politician. "Still we will support any candidate selected by the congress," Belykh said and promised that his party would send around 1,000 election observers to Belarus next year.

Belarus' southern neighbors also paid close attention to the Congress. Serhiy Evtushenko, deputy leader of the Ukrainian Pora movement, told TOL that the congress had "complete legitimacy" and that Milinkevich truly represents the collective choice of Belarusian democrats.

Support from the United States and the European Union for a single candidate was very evident: U.S. Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain sent a video to the congress and Janusz Onyszkiewicz, the Polish vice-president of the European Parliament, appeared on stage to urge the delegates "to go to the end with a single candidate."

STRIKING THE DIFFERENCES

There is no hint that any of the candidates have the skeletons in their closet suggested by Paznyak. But it was notable that three of the four felt the need to bring political skeletons out on show and apologize for them. Lyabedzka sought to justify being a member of Lukashenka's team in 1994 and helping him to gain power; Kalyakin excused his inability to speak Belarusian, and he also felt obliged to explain that the present-day Communists have nothing in common with their Stalin-era predecessors; and Shushkevich repeatedly defended signing the Belavezha treaty that dissolved the Soviet Union, an issue still painful for many in the Communist Party and beyond.

Only Milinkevich's closet so far seems bare. Even the state's propaganda teams have had difficulties targeting him, and he remains a little-known figure across the country. Milinkevich is certainly rather different from his main rival at the congress. Unlike Lyabedzka, he favors stronger presidential rule in the early phases of democratization. He is also less tolerant towards the present regime. In his speech Lyabedzka promised to guarantee security for Lukashenka and for his financial assets, a position not supported by Milinkevich, who said he would not offer protection to Lukashenka or any other state official if they had committed a crime.

Milinkevich is also very different from Lukashenka – from his haircut and his way of speaking (smooth and calm) to his vision of Belarus as a truly European country rather than a throwback to the Soviet era. There are also major differences between the president and his challenger on a personal level. Milinkevich's first words as a single candidate were dedicated to his wife Inna Kuley, who, smiling and bowing to the jubilant public, took the stage next to her husband. In 11 years in power, Lukashenka has never appeared in public with the first lady – let alone let his wife drive him in a car, as Inna did for her tired but happy husband.

In the throng at the congress – 160 journalists representing nearly 80 press and broadcast outlets as did diplomats from almost every Western mission and political figures from Ukraine and Russia – the usually deeply intrusive regime seemed crowded out. The event was also a tightly controlled affair, with 40 activists of the opposition National Alliance youth organization providing security, checking delegates' badges, and sealing off all entrances and exits.

Still, the state machinery found a way in after, rather reluctantly, the opposition permitted three crews from the most notorious Belarusian state television channels to film the event. Their first subject was a group of actors in clown

suits, two of whom posed as gay men. They ambushed the delegates on the front steps of the Palace of Culture, foisting balloons on them, and told the cameras that they would support a candidate who promoted gay marriage and could perform a kiss. The footage was used two days later on all major state channels in order to show "what kind of people are interested in choosing a single candidate." One state television program, At the Center of Attention, ended with the mocking slogan "Take Belarus into Europe through the arse."

Surprisingly, the programs did not attack Milinkevich personally. Other, less pleasant surprises may be in store.

Source: Transitions Online (www.tol.cz), October 11, 2005

This article was first published by Transitions Online (TOL) at www.tol.cz. TOL produces timely, original news and analysis, covering all 28 countries in the post-communist regions of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the former Soviet Union.

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Is a Peaceful Turn Towards Democracy Possible?

Described as the last remaining dictatorship in Europe, Belarus is scheduled to have a presidential election in 2006 that could prove crucial to the future of the country. After nonviolent democratic revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, questions arise about similar changes in Belarus: Is a peaceful transition to democracy in Belarus possible? And if so, what would be needed to make that happen?

On October 12, 2005, the Institute held an off-the-record discussion of these issues with people familiar with the situation in Belarus as well as with the recent nonviolent revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. What follows is a summary of the discussion. The views expressed do not reflect those of the Institute, which does not take policy positions.

Not "Rose" and Not "Orange"

Belarus is less susceptible to nonviolent political change than Ukraine and Georgia before their respective revolutions. A number of factors that aided the Orange and Rose revolutions are not present in Belarus: the ruler is more authoritarian, the public not yet as motivated to become involved, there is less access to independent media, and international support is not yet concerted. These are impediments, but not insurmountable ones. The dynamic between resistance and repression is always fluid and can alter conditions and improve the prospects for success. What strategies and tactics are called for given Belarus' circumstances?

Regime Players Frozen in Place

Unlike Presidents Shevarnadze in Georgia and Kuchma in Ukraine, Belarusan President Alexander Lukashenka not only dominates the political opposition but also dominates potential rivals within the regime. For the moment, he enjoys full control of the regime's coercive resources. With these functioning in a coordinated fashion, opposition is unlikely to be able to organize effectively until it achieves unity and follows a strategy aimed at weakening Lukashenka's control of his own government.

If democratic forces are to make progress, they need to divide the regime, somehow splitting loyalties within the regime's main pillars of support: the bureaucracy, the security forces, and the intelligence apparatus. In Georgia and Ukraine, the opposition was particularly effective at establishing contacts and connections within the security and intelligence forces and using them to limit the regime's ability to repress opposition groups. Such splits also appeared among the economic elite, including business leaders whose defection brought significant resources to the opposition.

The international community can best help by raising the costs to the regime of maintaining the status quo and lowering the costs of transition. For example, it could promise immunity for politicians who might fear international prosecution following a transition, or, alternatively, freeze the bank accounts and highlight the investment risks posed to business leaders complicit in fraudulent elections. Experience elsewhere has shown that limiting the ability of regime members and their families to travel abroad, through travel sanctions, has a personal impact on regime loyalties that few other measures achieve.

A Public not Ready to Act

Frequently cited poll numbers find support for Lukashenka hovering around 40 percent, while the strongest opposition figures, largely unknown, run in the low single digits.

Other numbers indicate that support for Lukashenka is softer, particularly polling results from the International Republican Institute, which indicate that the public finds his negative qualities outweigh his positive ones. In other research, the Pontis Foundation has found very small qualitative differences between what respondents described as satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This suggests that regime support is not solid. Repression by the Lukashenka regime has begun to make life observably abnormal for ordinary people, which if it continues will cast doubt on the regime's long-term survivability.

However, there has not yet been a "societal awakening" in support of change, which many Belarusans fear as a kind of instability and thus possibly not desirable. They also have little expectation of change coming as the result of elections. In recent polling from the Pontis Foundation, only 49% of respondents believed that elections could be free and fair, while 41% had doubts.

Unless the opposition can begin to shift these attitudes, as happened in Georgia and Ukraine, Belarusans are unlikely to take the risks that nonviolent opposition to the regime will necessarily incur. They will need to feel far more optimistic both about the likelihood of change and its benefits. Political opposition groups will have to conduct a unified campaign that articulates a positive agenda and does not simply call for the removal of Lukashenka. Choosing Milinkevich as the single opposition candidate was a significant step in the right direction, but there is still a long

way to go in convincing the public that he is a credible and appealing alternative.

The international community should encourage this shift in attitudes by assisting a broad range of local NGOs to jointly pursue a civic campaign that highlights the government's injustice and repression and generates an atmosphere of change. The opposition will need, in the event of fraudulent elections, to be able to mount a post-election campaign that mobilizes a critical mass of Belarusans, perhaps culminating in street demonstrations in numbers so great that the security forces will hesitate to attack.

Public Access to Independent Sources of Information and Media

Another important finding of the Pontis Foundation research is that Belarus lacks a public discourse 'mirror.' Without independent media or other sources of information, the public has difficulty learning what others value and think. For example, the Pontis Foundation found that 68% of respondents believed that their views were shared by a majority of the population. These numbers did not change significantly when asking Lukashenka opponents (70%) or Lukashenka supporters (74%). This lack of a public discourse makes it difficult to achieve a critical mass in support of a transition, which depends on a shared, national sense of outrage—though, as several participants noted, there are ingenious methods of communicating with the public that trained activists have developed for such situations.

Independent sources of information are also essential to build the public's knowledge of the opposition platform and, immediately following elections, to circulate news of any elections fraud. Taking into account time pressures, strategies for addressing this obstacle should take account of Belarusan geography, particularly the ability to broadcast to the entire country from neighboring countries, as the Voice of America Russian service does currently. (**Editor's note:** The coverage of Belarusan topics by VOA is currently rather limited, consisting of 15 minutes weekly. The Belarus Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty provides considerably greater coverage, however with shortwave radio being the main medium of transmission of all current broadcasts, their audience is limited. The addition of satellite television and FM broadcasting from the neighboring countries that is being readied, should reach a greater percentage of listeners.)

Internationalists

Many Europeans view Belarus through the prism of their relationship with Russia. Their need for oil and gas from Russia makes them hesitant to "upset the apple cart" in Belarus. Some Europeans also erroneously regard the Orange Revolution in Ukraine as an American intervention, and one that creates problems for Europe insofar as it raises the issue of expanding the EU further to the East than many Europeans regard as desirable. Transition in Belarus is likely to be viewed in the same way.

It is vital that the international community overcomes its hesitations and uses its full weight in support of democratic forces in Belarus, as it did in due course in Ukraine. Freezing the foreign accounts of Belarus' leaders and their allies would be an important step. The United States and EU will also need to warn the regime of the consequences of electoral fraud or violent repression.

Conclusion

The situation in Belarus for those seeking a peaceful, democratic transition there poses a different and arguably greater set of challenges from those found in Ukraine or Georgia. Directly transferring to Belarus the strategies that worked in those countries would likely be ineffective (thereby disproving the conspiracy theorists who believe that "people power" can be externally inspired according to some formula). But almost every case of democratic transition seems impossible until it happens, and then it is regarded as inevitable. The question is whether the Belarusan opposition can develop a strategy that uses independent communications to mobilize public readiness to act and that spurs doubt about the regime's sustainability among its own forces—and whether the international community will step forward to punish the regime for repression and aid the nonviolent democratic opposition.

This USIPeace Briefing was written by Andrew Murrell, a contractor at the U.S. Institute of Peace. The Institute is an independent nonpartisan national institution established and funded by Congress The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

HISTORICAL DATES

November 3, 1882
The birthdate of **Jakub Kolas** - an outstanding Belarusian poet of the national reanaissance era.

November 26, 1930
The birthdate of **Uladzimier Karatkievic** - a noted Belarusian writer of the Soviet era. Most of his works dealt with Belarus' history. Deceased in 1984.



BELARUS' FORUM

Iryna Krasouskaya: "Our Freedom Starts With That"

On November 29, 2005 Iryna Krasouskaya represented Belarus in Tbilisi at an international forum "New Wave of Europe's Liberation: Democracy and Transformation" scheduled on the second anniversary of the Rose Revolution in Georgia.

• Iryna, Georgia and Ukraine recently celebrated anniversaries of their revolutions. To your mind, after some time, was the choice of these nations a right one, and what are their prospects now?

Analysing the two years that have passed after the revolution, Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili said that the people of Georgia turned out to be more prepared for the freedom than expected. In the two years the people of Georgia have become real masters of their country, they have become responsible for its future, for the future of the nation.

I think that these words are true for the present situation in Ukraine. Ukrainian President Viktar Yushchenko said that only the nation could win in the Orange Revolution. And Ukrainians stood up from their knees. More than a million of people gathered at Independence Square to defend freedom.



Iryna Krasouskaya

• You have taken part in the representative international forum "New Wave of Europe's Liberation: Democracy and Transformation" in Tbilisi. What questions were discussed at the forum?

I was invited to the celebration of the second anniversary of the Rose Revolution by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili. I was lucky to meet with the people who are legends and symbols of the fight for justice, freedom and democracy. It was a serious discussion on the problems of freedom, rule of law, order, justice, about responsibility, and about dictatorship.

A brilliant report has been made by Natan Sharansky. He spoke about the foundations of democracy, about the free society and a society of fear, about dictatorship and dictators.

Mikhail Saakashvili said that dictators are terrorists. They terrorize their neighbours and their own people; they create military regimes and exterminate their own population; they use force against their own citizens.

• Was a serious concern over existence of the dictatorship of Lukashenka in Europe expressed by the participants of the conference?

The Belarusian question was discussed in the framework of the problems related to dictatorships' existence. In this I agree with Natan Sharansky, who has always been harsh towards dictatorial regimes and always stated that it is better to speak plainly. A country where political opponents go missing, where non-governmental organizations are liquidated, where no freedom of speech exists is a dictatorship. And only by defining the regime, one could look for way to change the situation.

Changing the situation in Belarus depends on us. It depends on how soon we would manage to overcome our fear. What makes us different from the people of Georgia and Ukraine? We are the same, we want to live in a free and democratic country.

• In your speech in Tbilisi, you called upon the international community to take a common stand in trade with Lukashenka's regime, and to introduce much more restrictive economic sanctions, didn't you?

As before, I am sure that no cooperation with dictatorship is possible. If some of our neighbours are still hoping for that, I think they are insincere and just follow their vested interest, using their negative attitude towards the self-isolation of Belarus as a smoke screen.

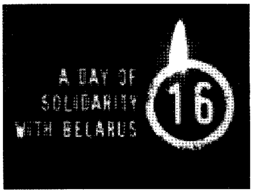
I have discussed these problems with prominent politicians in Europe and USA, and they supported me, saying that cooperation with Lukashenka's regime is impossible. Development of civil society, support of the democratic forces, increasing the number of cultural, students' exchanges are possible to give the Belarusians an opportunity to get acquainted with the values of Europe, so that they would understand how abnormal life under dictatorship is in the modern world.

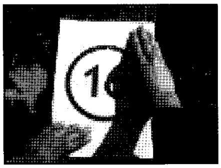
• It is known that you have become one of the initiators of holding the Days of Belarusian Solidarity. Why?

As Natan Sharansky, Mikhail Saakashvili, Viktor Yushchenko said in Tbilisi, the most important thing to gain the freedom is to overcome fear. To overcome the fear inside yourself. Not all can overcome their fear openly, at the square. But for many to switch off the light for15 minutes is a deed. And maybe that's to become the beginning of our freedom.

I am grateful to all Belarusians, our friends abroad who express their solidarity and light candles on the 16th day of every month. I want to tell you about one remarkable episode. When I was flying to Tbilisi in a plane, Andre Glucksmann (**Editor's Note:** a French philosopher) approached me. He had read an article about the Days of Solidarity in Belarus in the Economist, and that the Belarusian democrats have chosen denim blue the symbol of the freedom. Glucksmann pointed to his jeans and said: "I'm with you!"

Source: Charter '97 Press Center, November 29, 2005.





Day of Solidarity

"This time many more people have taken part in the Day of Belarusian Solidarity. According to our common estimates, we can speak of 300 thousand Belarusians who on November 16 took part in the action of solidarity. I would like to note in particular the activeness of people in the regions. Many regional centres, settlements and villages lit up candles of Freedom," said a well-known journalist Iryna Khalip, who was one of the initiators of the Days of Solidarity, to the Charter'97 press center. "I think that by December 16 there would be even more supporters of the Day of Solidarity. It arouses understanding, strikes a deep chord in the heart of every concerned citizen. Those who are burning candles today, tomorrow are to form a basis of future mass resistance to dictatorship, and finally, this would lead us to victory".

"We are grateful to Vaclav Havel, Bronislaw Geremek, Aldis Kuskis, Azim Mollazade, Christos Pourgourides and other emblematic personalities, who have supported the Day of Belarusian Solidarity. The Day of Solidarity has become a national day already, and very soon, I hope, it is to become the day of international solidarity with Belarus. More and more states, politicians, human rights activists, common citizens are supporting us.

Another initiator of the Days of Belarusian Solidarity, a coordinator of the Zubr movement Mikita Sasim stated that the awareness campaign before the November 16 was much wider than before the October event. According to the estimation of the Zubr movement, about 1.5 mln of people have learnt about the action and about 300,000 have taken part in it.

Source: Web site http://www.solidarity16.org.eng., December 2, 2005.



Culture & Society

European Students Defend Tatsiana Khoma

Following the decision by the Belarus State Economic University to expel a fourth year student, Ms Tatsiana Khoma, for participating in a meeting of the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) without the permission of the university, the European University Association (EUA) has suspended the university's EUA membership, and calls upon its members to cease all cooperation with the institution.

On 25 November 2005, EUA President, Professor Georg Winckler, on behalf of EUA's individual and collective members, addressed a letter to the Rector of the university, Professor Shymau (Shimov), when it was learned that Ms Khoma had been threatened with expulsion as a result of her activities on behalf of national and European students. In this letter, Professor Winckler expressed concern at these developments, referring to the fundamental values and principles of the Association enshrined in the 1988 Magna Charta Universitatum, which include the duty of each university to "ensure that its students' freedoms are safeguarded".



Tatsiana Khoma

Despite this letter, Ms Khoma was expelled on Friday, 25 November, and ejected immediately from the university dormitory where she was living. On 29 November, Professor Winckler wrote again to Professor Shymau, insisting that this decision be revoked immediately, and stating that if this were not done that EUA would have no option but to suspend the Belarus State Economic University membership of EUA until the university is able to guarantee the common values and principles of European universities.

Professor Shymau has not answered these letters, and has instead issued a statement on the university website that the expulsion of Ms. Khoma was justified by her violation of university regulations, and that the decision was made "in accordance with the norms of the Republic of Belarus legislation in the field of education."

EUA calls upon all its member universities to support ESIB's campaign to reinstate Ms Khoma at the university and to continue her studies and other activities on behalf of students free from harassment.

In a response to BSEU's suspension from EUA, the rector V. Shymau stated that the expulsion of Tatsiana was only one of many made this year. "This academic year, 50 students were expelled for the same reason of violating the University Regulations. Ms. Khoma was the 51st one."

He also claims to be an advocate of observing student rights, but the right to freedom of movement "should be fully exercised exclusively when there are no classes in progress. Their missing classes is a gross violation of the University Regulations."

In a comment to the letter, ESIB chairperson Vanja Ivosevic was shocked to hear that more than 50 students had been expelled from the university this academic year for similar reasons as Tatsiana's. "If it's true, that would mean students have been expelled almost every day!" "It's also very ironic that the rector feels unjustly treated when his university is suspended from EUA."

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The National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) is the umbrella organisation of 44 national unions of students from 34 countries and through these members represents over 10 million students. Newly elected ESIB Executive Committee member Tatsiana Khoma has been expelled from her university in Belarus. The official reason for this action is the fact that she did not inform the university beforehand that she would attend ESIB's European Student Gathering in France last week.

Students all over Europe demand Tatsiana's reinstatement at BSEU. Norwegian students immediately created a special web site in defense of Tatsiana. In just 4 days after her expulsion it collected over 5700 signatures of students from 40 countries worldwide. A similar web site in Belarus — **www.studenty. alternativy.net** collected 720 signatures during the same time period.

Ms. Khoma appealed to Belarus' Ministry of Education protesting her ungrounded expulsion. BSEU instructors pledged to supply positive appraisals of the expelled student.

Source: Charter '97 Press Center, 7 and 9 December, 2005

1350

is the number of people in Belarus, who in 2001-2005 were arrested or expelled from universities and high schools due to their political activity.

Source: Human Rights defense organization "Viasna."

HISTORICAL DATES

December 9, 1550

Barbara Radzivil crowned in Vilnia - becomes the Grand Duchess of Litva and Queen of Poland.

January 28, 1588

Third and final edition of the **Statute** (Collection of Laws) of the Grand Duchy of Litva was published and ratified. The Statute is a unique monument of the medieval Belarusian judicial thinking and literature.

January 30, 1667

Truce of Andrusava concluded between Grand Duchy of Litva and Duchy of Moscow, terminating the bloodiest war in Belarus' history (1654-1667).

From BELARUS' History

Union with Sweden - a Little Known Page in History

Excerpts from an RFE/RL interview

350 years ago, on October 20, 1655 the town of Kedainiai (located in today's Lithuania) witnessed the conclusion of the union agreement creating a federation of two European states - Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Litva. On Litva's side, the agreement was signed by 1172 representatives of Grand Duchy's nobility - more than ever participated in the election of a Polish King.

What followed was a 2-year long interruption of the existing Litva's federation with Poland.

A correspondent of Radio Liberty interviewed the historian Andrej Kotljarchuk, who is now preparing in Sweden a book on this interesting event.

For Litva's nobility the main reason for promoting the union with Sweden was the inability of the Polish king Kazimier to adequately defend Litva's territories against incursions by Moscow and the Ukrainian Cossacks.

They explained that the Grand Duchy's Statute allows them to break the union with Poland and enter a union of equals with Sweden.

However, at that time a considerable part of Belarusian lands was occupied by Moscow and the Ukrainian Cossack state. So, for practical purposes, only some Belarusian regions joined Sweden: the district of Braslau and the Duchy of Slucak with towns Slucak and Kapyl.

Mr. Kotljarchuk: "Actually, thanks to the new Union, Litva saved itself as a state. Otherwise it would have disappeared already in the middle of the 17th century, like the Ukrainian Cossack state. The impact of the union agreement was significant; it radically changed the distribution of powers in the East Baltic region. Polish historians describe the new union in negative terms, calling it an act of treason, and insignificant event.

Actually the rest of Europe understood its significance. Soon the translated text of the Kedainiai agreement appeared in print in Amsterdam, Paris, Hamburg and London. Italian newspapers wrote: We understand the reason for Litva joining Sweden. In contrast to Poland, it is inhabited by many Protestants: Lutherans, Calvinists, Aryans."

Mr. Kotljarchuk points out that the factor of religion played a significant role in the 17th century events. The principal initiator of the union was the Calvinist Yanush Radzivill and other Protestants. Although they constituted a minority of the Grand Duchy's nobility, it was a very influential minority. Its members were educated in best universities of The Netherlands and Germany. Moreover , the Protestant nobility was numerically second after the Catholics. The new union agreement guaranteed equal rights to the Roman Catholic, Uniate (Greek Catholic) and Orthodox churches.

Mr. Kotljarchuk: "Radzivill's idea was to build a Protestant political state, between Orthodox Moscow and Roman Catholic Poland."

According to Mr. Kotljarchuk the failure of the union with Sweden was caused by both internal and external factors. Internally, various groups within the Grand Duchy were oriented toward various foreign powers - beginning with Moscow and ending with Transylvania. The pro-Polish orientation eventually prevailed.

" The external cause for union's failure was a result of strategic mistakes of the Swedish leadership. It distributed its activities equally to Poland and The Grand Duchy. One Swedish army was sent to Litva , and another to Poland On the whole, however, Swedish interests in Poland received priority, even though Swedes could not expect any support from the Polish society. As a result they were defeated in both places," said Mr. Kotljarchuk.

He further stressed that the union with Litva gave Sweden control over the entire Baltic coast, thus making the Baltic sea an "internal Swedish lake." However, in his opinion, the Kedainiai union was also advantageous to the Grand Duchy.

"First of all, a part of Belarus was spared a war. Secondly, the idea was to make Belarus a part of a dynamic Swedish empire. We know, for instance, that in the history of neighboring Latvia the relatively short period of Swedish rule (1622 -1704) is remembered as the 'good Swedish time.'"

In today's Latvia the Swedish government implemented a land reform, founded a university, established a system of popular education, published the Bible in Latvian, and helped the development of literature in the Latvian language. By stressing the education of teachers and Protestant clergy, it created the first Latvian national elite in Latvia's history. This effectively stopped the germanization of the Latvian ethnos and built a foundation for a successful Latvian patriotic movement.

Belarus was not that lucky at the time, since Sweden was defeated in that particular war. However, if the dreams of the contemporary Protestant elite were realized, today's Belarus would resemble a Northern European Protestant nation, considering the mentality and culture of its people. In any case, the Protestants of the Grand Duchy of Litva contributed much more to Belarus' culture than is admitted by contemporary Belarusian historians."

QUOTES of QUARTER

"The most important thing for gaining freedom is to overcome fear. To overcome the fear inside yourself."

Iryna Krasouskaya, leader of the civil initiative "We Remember," *in an interview to* Charter '97 *on November 29, 2005, in* Tbilisi, Georgia.

* * *

"In future Belarus and Georgia will inevitably join the EU."

Zbigniew Brzezinski, *political scientist, statesman, former U.S. National Security Advisor.*

Scandinavian Way for Belarus and Lithuania in 1655

By Andrej Kotljarchuk

Editor's Note: *The Winter 2005 issue of the* BELARUSIAN REVIEW *contains the introduction and concluding paragraphs of Mr. Kotljarchuk's article. The complete text may be found on our web site* ***www.belarusianreview.org.***

The Union of Kiejdany, signed in Kedainiai October 20, 1655, under which the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia and Samogitia and Sweden united into one state, resulted in the adoption of three principle documents. (**Editor's Note:** The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia and Samogitia — the GDL, is also known in Belarusian as the Grand Duchy of Litva. In the 16-17th centuries the English term Ruthenia was applied to the Belarusian part, while Samogitia denoted the Baltic, present-day Lithuanian part of the GDL.) Under the first document, the Act of the State Union dated to October 20 1655, Sweden and the GDL united into one federative state. The text of the Union was signed by 1172 members of the Lithuanian-Ruthenian political nation.

The second act represented a public declaration to the international community by the GDL in which the reasons of breaking the union with Poland and joining Sweden were explained. Nearly 1060 people belonging to the Litvanian political elite signed that document on October 20, 1655. The public declaration was also printed beforehand in Latin and German in Kedainiai (October 15) and sent to European countries. Very quickly it was published in Dutch, German and English in Amsterdam, Hamburg and London.

Finally, the third act, signed by about 450 nobles, was adopted in Kedainiai on October 23 1655. Under this act the Litvanian Advisory Council led by Bengt Skytte "legate of the Swedish king in Litva" was inaugurated. One representative ecclesiastical estate and 3 nobles from each district were elected. In 1655, the Swedish administration control embraced the counties of Samogitia, Braslau, Ukmerge, Kaunas and Upyte. The formation and activities of the Advisory Pro-Swedish Litvanian Council, as well as the other pro-Swedish activities of its members, show that the agreements in Kedainiai, were more than a mere conspiracy of the Radzivills, but had a wider social and political supports.

The Swedish side was represented in Kedainiai by two senators Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie and Bengt Skytte. Litvanian magnates and nobility spoke on behalf of the whole country. The subscribers noted that after adopting the original act in August of 1655 now the final document was made. Unlike the declaration of August 17, the text of the union was not divided into articles and was a document of a shorter content. The key provisions were as follows:

— The Union with Sweden was declared "everlasting", i.e. efficient for all the successors of the subscribers. Karl X (and his successors) was validated as Grand Duke of Litva. All previous unions and agreements with the Polish king had to be revoked.

— The elections of grand duke and king "in the way it was at the time of Union with Poland" had to be repealed. The future Swedish kings were automatically recognized as grand dukes of Litva. Only in case of interruption of Royal dynasty ("God save you"), the political nation had to be admitted to elections without laying claim to obtain equal voting quota together with the estates of the Swedish Kingdom. Thus, the Litvanian nobility lost their right to elect grand duke and king.

— The GDL and Samogitia, the latter having a special status, preserved their own autonomy and legal system. Any changes on behalf of the Swedish king had to be solved at a common Diet.

—The GDL retained religious liberties including all the rights of Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches and all Protestant congregations, as well as the automatic eligibility of Roman Catholic bishops for Senate membership. The king of Sweden was announced temporal patron of all church land estates and the clergy.

— The GDL army submitted to the king of Sweden. The noble levy was also to be transferred under Karl's X command and his successors. The Swedish king had the right to use the army at his own discretion against all his close enemies except overseas. In case of emergency the Litvanian army could be sent overseas with a limited number of soldiers. To send the noble levy to overseas wars was prohibited. The king of Sweden had all prerogatives to make peace or to declare war.

— Litva's political nation agreed that the Royal residence had to be outside the Duchy. Therefore direct administration in the GDL had to be passed to royal viceroy for Litva. The power to give the residence permit in both countries belonged to the king of Sweden and his successors.

— A special paragraph was devoted to relations with Poland. The GDL agreed to wage war with Poland together with Sweden: "In case of war between the two kingdoms the GDL will support Sweden and if Poland break war against the GDL, Sweden will assist the GDL."

— A special paragraph was devoted to Livonian baronial: "those of the Livonians who in accordance with residence permit became Litvanians will have the same rights and liberties as the true Litvanians as it was hitherto in the GDL."

— Finally, the two parties pointed out that the act of public union is temporary and will, though with amendments, be obligatory ratified by the king of Sweden: "All separate articles of the agreement can not be appealed against or suspended by the Pope of Rome, Bishops or other Catholic church authorities or dietines, resolutions or other authorities. Only the king of Sweden has the right to demand from Litvanian estates alterations if he finds them necessary. However, in case the king wishes no changes, all this remains lawful, valid and eternal. "

Thus, compared to the 17 August, 1655 declaration the Swedish diplomacy made a considerable progress. Except for the consent that Roman Catholic bishops can take senators' positions, all the provisions disaccording Swedish interests were deleted. The demand from Sweden to start war against Russia and Ukraine to liberate the occupied territories of the GDL was completely declined. The Litvanians did not lay claim of equal union any more and asked for only one thing - to preserve the right of its own autonomy under the Swedish protectorate. Consequently, Litva also refused the right to act "as equal partner" in future negotiations between Sweden and Poland. The demand to pay the money at the expense of local taxes for the needs of the GDL's army was also declined. After the transition of most of the Catholic officers to Poland's side, the rights of Malta Order Knights were not mentioned anymore. Article 2 of the 17th August declaration witnessed that the army gave consent to transfer under the Swedish king's command, and strongly objected to wage war against Poland. On October 20 1655, for the first time in history Litva agreed to carry war against Poland.

• • •

... The Union of Kedainiai shows a fundamental difference between the Swedish approach to the protection over Litva and Poland. In case of Poland, the matter concerns the Swedish attack on Poland at first, occupation of considerable part of its territory, and then capitulation of some of the palatines and involuntary confession of Swedish domination. In case of Litva, it is a question of preliminary talks of the Duchy's administration with Sweden about Swedish protection over the whole territory, and then peaceful entry of the Swedish army.

Thus, in the end of 1655 - the beginning of 1656, the multiethnic political elite of Litva utterly fulfilled the task on spreading advantageous information about Kedainiai Union over the whole Europe. The Polish viewpoint of the union of that time remained unknown to the international community. Only the latest Polish historiography did its best to create a negative image of the union in Kedainiai in the European tradition. The modern point of view of European historiography on the Kedainiai Union as the temporary and ordinary action of submission with minimal consequences is a later model created in accordance with the Polish myth. This point of view disaccords with reality: the union was of great international importance and echoed throughout the whole Europe at that time.

For the first time Sweden and the GDL outlined the principle of future federation. Under these plans, Lithuania and Belarus were supposed to enter the Swedish territories in the East of Baltic, namely Carelia, Ingria, Estonia and Latvia. Instead of GDL's submission to Sweden, the the estates proposes equal union between the Grand Duchy of Litva and Sweden. In the opinion of Lithuanian-Ruthenian estates, the design of the future federation had to be the same as that of the 1569 union between the GDL and Poland. The historical Litvanians figured on autonomy, their own legislation, court and religious liberties. Geographical remoteness between the GDL and Sweden gave the local political elite comprehensive facilities to arrange their own public life. It was also a real chance to stop Muscovite and Ukrainian occupation, to save the country from the crisis and to ensure it stable development within

the "Swedish Empire." The Union of Kedainiai showed that, in the 17th century, Belarus was alreday a well-integrated part of the European community.

Mr. Andrej Kotljarchuk is a historian with the Södertörn University College in Stockholm, Sweden.

Thoughts and Observations

Authorities 'Cleanse' Media Ahead of 2006

By Jan Maksymiuk

Last week Belposhta, Belarus' state postal service decided to exclude three private periodicals from its subscription catalogue for the first half of 2006. Belposhta is a monopoly, which disseminates the country's press through subscription. The move seems to be a repressive measure intended to marginalize the remainder of opposition-minded press in Belarus ahead of the 2006 presidential election.

The targeted periodicals are the daily *Narodnaya volya* and the weeklies *Salidarnasts* and *Zhoda*. *Narodnaya volya* has a print run of 27,000 copies, *Salidarnasts* 5,400, and *Zhoda* 3,000. Belposhta explained the move against the newspapers in three similar notifications saying that, "Each economic entity has the right to be guided by economic expediency in its commercial activities." Apart from this explanation sent to *Narodnaya volya*, Belposhta also charged that the daily failed to notify it about a change of the printer.

The newspapers' editors were bemused by the decision, to say the least. "It is unclear how this concerned the distributor, as the schedule of publication did not change and the volume remained the same," *Narodnaya volya* Editor in Chief Svyatlana Kalinkina commented. *Narodnaya volya* has filed a suit against Belposhta over the subscription stoppage. *Salidarnasts* Editor in Chief Alyaksandr Starykevich said that non-state media in Belarus are now entering "an era of the Internet and samizdat."

Both Kalinkina and Starykevich concur that it will be extremely difficult for them to organize an independent distribution network for their periodicals. *Narodnaya volya, Salidarnasts,* and *Zhoda* have long struggled to remain afloat in an unwelcoming media environment. Both domestic and foreign human rights activists have accused the Belarusian authorities of trying to liquidate or gag the independent media.

Narodnaya volya, as the largest of the three periodicals, was a special target for the authorities in the past two years. The daily was initially plagued with libel suits — since March 2004, *Narodnaya volya* has received fines of some $90,000 in four separate libel cases.

In a country where the official monthly wage is around $200, such exorbitant damages were apparently intended to ruin the newspaper economically. However, each time the daily was able to collect the money for damages among its sponsors and readers and remain afloat.

In April, Zhanna Litvina, chairwoman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, predicted that the Belarusian authorities were seeking "a total cleansing of the information sector" in the country. Yelena Raubetskaya, chairwoman for the Fund for the Development of Regional Press, was even bleaker in her prognosis. She said that libel suits against independent media would be followed by the removal of major nonstate publications from state-run print shops and state-controlled press-distribution networks. "I am absolutely sure that by 2006, the nongovernmental press that writes about politics will no longer exist," Raubetskaya added.

Raubetskaya's prediction has unfortunately proved true. In September, Belsayuzdruk, Belarus' state monopoly that runs a nationwide network of kiosks and newsstands, terminated a contract for the distribution of *Narodnaya volya* after a court froze the newspaper's bank account and seized newsprint demanding payment of libel damages.

The same day, the Minsk-based printing plant Chyrvonaya zorka annulled its contract for printing the daily. *Narodnaya volya* — like nearly a dozen other Belarusian independent periodicals, including *Salidarnasts* and *Zhoda* — was forced to find a printer in Smolensk, a Russian provincial capital near the Belarusian border.

Apart from restricting distribution and applying economic pressure, the authorities employ other, more indirect, tactics against the independent press. In May President Alyaksandr Lukashenka issued a decree limiting the use of the words "national" and "Belarusian" in the names of organizations. Private media outlets were not allowed to use both of these words in their names.

The presidential decree in particular compelled many newspaper to reregister in August and September: *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta* (Belarusian Business Newspaper) as *BDG; Delovaya gazeta, Natsionalnaya ekonomicheskaya gazeta* (National Economic Newspaper) as *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta, Belorusskii rynok* (Belarusian Market) as *Belorussy i rynok* (Belarusians and the Market); and *Belorusskaya gazeta* as *Belgazeta.*

Many Belarusian commentators said that the reregistration was primarily intended to confuse and disorient the readers of independent periodicals and make it difficult for them to find their preferred publications on newsstands or in subscription catalogues. This year, the Belarusian authorities also set a precedent by de facto nationalizing a private periodical. The situation occurred in May, during a Polish-Belarusian diplomatic row over the new leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus (SPB), which was supported by Warsaw but not recognized by Minsk.

Warsaw was forced to suspend the sponsoring of the SPB weekly *Glos znad Niemna* (Voice From Over The Niemen River) after a state printing plant in Belarus refused to publish materials prepared by its editorial staff and published several fake issues of the weekly with articles reflecting only official Minsk's stance on the SPB standoff. "It is a de facto

nationalization of an independent publication,"Andrzej Poczobut, a ethnic Polish journalist in Belarus, told RFE/RL. "If you ask my opinion about who's behind this, I'm sure it is the [Belarusian] KGB."

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the Belarusian opposition's choice to challenge Lukashenka in the 2006 presidential election, believes that the official distribution restrictions against *Narodnaya volya, Salidarnasts,* and *Zhoda* testify to the Belarusian regime's growing uncertainty about how Belarusians will behave during the ballot. "The authorities' move looks surprising at first glance, as there are almost no independent newspapers left in the Belarusian news industry," Milinkevich said. "This means that the authorities are seriously afraid of the forthcoming presidential election and are seeking to deprive our people of the opportunity to hear an alternative point of view." But this move also leaves him and his election staff with a thorny dilemma about how, if at all, the opposition will manage to present an alternative point of view to the electorate in the presidential campaign.

Source: RFE/RL, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, November 21, 2005

Opposition Courts The Belarusian Public

By David Marples

Following the election of Alexander Milinkevich as the leader of the united opposition at the Democratic Convention in early October, the Belarusian opposition has begun to elaborate its tactics for the anticipated elections in the summer of 2006.

The Political Council created after the Convention recently approved the strategy for the Milinkevich campaign, which has four key directions. First: the nomination of a single candidate and a campaign to achieve the support of 50% of the electorate. Emphasis is placed on creating a positive image of the candidate and broadening the campaign. Second: the mobilization of the public and the need to put strong pressure on the authorities not to falsify the election results. Third, according to Alexander Dabravolski, it is necessary to create a "broad movement of the majority," a statement that assumes that the silent majority does not support President Alexander Lukashenka. Milinkevich himself also stated the importance of involving public associations in the broad coalition that the opposition hopes to create (*Belarusy i Rynok*, October 31).



This last goal was also expressed at a roundtable on "The Third Sector in Belarus in 2006: Its Place and Functions," held in Minsk and moderated by Tatyana Poshevalova, the head of the Center of Social Innovation. The roundtable was attended by 20 non-governmental organizations, including Rada, Ekodom, and Post, as well as Viktar Korneyenka, a representative of Milinkevich's headquarters, who was attending, in his words, "to look for supporters" (*BDG Delovaya Gazeta*, October 25).

Though the Milinkevich campaign seems to have started well, the omens are rather mixed, according to a recent poll conducted by the National Institute for Social-Economic and Political Research under Oleg Manayev, which now operates in Vilnius. The poll was based on 1,504 respondents in Belarus over the age of 18 on a variety of issues in face-to-face interviews.

In general, the respondents revealed a trust in official institutions; first and foremost the Orthodox Church, followed by the army, and then the state media and the president. The index of trust in the president has risen considerably since last June. Least trusted were organs of state power like the Central Election Commission, the courts, and the parliament, but ranking dead last were the Belarusian opposition political parties. However, somewhat undermining the validity of these responses, 50% declared that many or all people were afraid to express their views, particularly outside Minsk (*BDG Delovaya Gazeta*, October 25).

In terms of the presidential contest, 47.5% stated their intention to vote for Lukashenka and 25.5% for an opposition leader — even though at the time of the poll, the results of the Democratic Convention were not yet known. Lukashenka's personal rating had risen to 47% (compared to 41.7% in May), which Manayev attributes in part to an aggressive propaganda campaign and the international self-isolation of Belarus. During an election, 45% declared their readiness to reelect Lukashenka, while 45% felt it would be preferable to give an opportunity to an alternative candidate. In general the more affluent among the respondents were more likely to oppose the president. Over 70% believed that Lukashenka would win, 15% felt he could be removed by a democratic "color revolution," and 15.5% were ready to take to the streets in protest if the results were falsified (76% declared they would not do so). Lastly only around 13% favored the integration of Belarus into the Russian Federation, whereas 20% had supported this three years earlier (Narodnaya volya, October 26).

That these results preceded the emergence of Milinkevich may give rise to some hope for a serious campaign. If one were to summarize the overall picture from the survey, one could state that overall the president remains popular, but his support is not overwhelming -- nothing like the 83% he claimed to have received during the October 2004 referendum -- and a substantial percentage would support an alternative candidate while a heavy majority favors the retention of independence, a key factor in the Milinkevich campaign.

A key question, however, is: to what extent the opposition is truly united? Leaders of the Conservative Christian Party of the BPF (CCP BPF) denounced the Democratic Convention as a "noisy show of the anti-Belarusian pseudo opposition." It accused the Convention leaders of making

regular trips to Moscow to exchange information with the Russian secret services, and claims that this united opposition was created at the end of the 1990s by Russian and German secret services to split and eliminate the BPF "Adradzhenne" formed a decade earlier. The alleged goal of the Congress, according to CCP BBF leaders declared, was to distract attention from the only true candidate of Belarusian national democracy and the Belarusian people, Zyanon Paznyak (*Belarusy i Rynok*, October 24).

This outburst demonstrates the depth of enmity among some opposition groups, and the exiled Paznyak's antagonism toward Milinkevich. The CCP BPF opposes any strategy that is conciliatory toward Russia and would prefer to boycott any official election or referendum campaigns. Such squabbling only benefits the regime and the incumbent president, and it undermines the claim of Milinkevich to speak on behalf of a united opposition. Clearly he must continue his quest to unite as many parties and groups as possible.

Source: Eurasian Daily Monitor, November 8, 2005

Window on Eurasia: Minsk, Moscow Increasingly Divided on New Union

By Paul Goble

Tallinn, November 30, 2005 — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is less interested in consummating a union between his country and the Russian Federation than he is in exploiting discussions about such a possibility to shore up his own power, an approach that may be putting him ever more at odds with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

For Lukashenka and his regime, Belarusian participants in a roundtable organized by the Moscow journal *Apologiya* said, talk about unity serves their interests, but actual unity would threaten them. But for Putin and his government, the process itself ties the Russian government's hands whereas the achievement of unity might help Moscow.

And because of this divergence, the eight analysts argued, Minsk will almost likely to take the lead in talking about a new union state, even as Moscow becomes more frustrated with the transparent way in which Lukashenka is manipulating the situation. (www.journalapologia.rurnews.html?id=388&id_issue=121).

Sergei Nikolyuk, a commentator for *Belarusskiy rynok*, put this case directly: "Lukashenka does not need real integration" with Russia. Indeed, he and his regime have regularly pursued an anti-Russian policy "within the republic" even though Lukashenka continues to call for the building up of a new union state with the Russian Federation.

Moreover, most of the Belarusian elite and the Belarusian opposition share that perspective, Nikolyuk continued. A recent poll showed that members of the Minsk elite say that only Arab countries are more hostile to Belarus than the Russian Federation, a view that reflects their political loyalties and economic interests.

Ever more of them are aware, the newspaper columnist said, that their survival in office depends on the maintenance of an independent Belarus and that their personal wealth depends on that because Western countries are buying an ever increasing share of Belarusian production and the Russian Federation an ever smaller one.

Indeed, Peter Martsev, the editor of the *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, said, the interests of the elite on this matter can best be understood by recognizing that ?the Republic of Belarus is [in fact] the state corporation "Belarus,"— an entity in which these economic interests are likely to predominate.

But it is the political uses to which Lukashenka has put this process that are even significant, according to Andrei Suzdal'tsev, the coordinator of the Minsk Expert Analysis Group. In his view, Lukashenka has successfully "privatized" the idea of integration in order to cope with three challenges that he faces at home and abroad.

First, by holding out the prospect of unity, he has secured massive economic assistance from the Russian Federation, something that has allowed him to prevent social-economic instability in Belarus from spinning out of control.

Second, he has used talk of a new union state to defend his own legitimacy both at home and abroad, simultaneously allowing him to pose as a leader with a big future and limiting Moscow's willingness to condemn his authoritarianism. The latter is especially important for him because it gives him an ally against Western criticism.

And third, because "Belarus is a country of clan," the elite can either continuing to back Lukashenka and this project or be swept away by a revolutionary turn to democracy. Given that choice, most in the elite come down on the side of Lukashenka and the "pursuit" of a new union.

Consequently, in the name of unity with the Russian Federation, the Belarusian regime "has put under its control all societal institutions which are potentially dangerous for itself —the mass media, communications, interest groups, young people, pensioners, the intelligentsia, the students, the working class and of course the trade unions."

And that in turn has had the effect of making the opposition in Belarus ever more pro-Western and anti-Russian, something that the roundtable participants agreed also helps Lukashenka: Their views have constrained Moscow from talking about values or taking any action that might open the way for Belarus to an Orange-style revolution.

But there is evidence that at least some in the Russian leadership are beginning to understand Lukashenka's game although those taking part in this discussion argued that there is as yet little to suggest that the Russian authorities have figured out just how they want to play it in the future.

The tensions over the supply of gas in February 2004 clearly reflected Russia's frustration with Lukashenka, and according to Suzdal'tsev, represented an attempt by Moscow to "seize the initiative" in the unification process —

by forcing the Belarusian government to ever more openly demonstrate its congenital inability to real integration.

What is most intriguing about such views is that they are coming not from the Belarusian opposition or from the West but rather from Belarusian journalists, analysts and academics operating in the very limited public space in their country between the regime and its most vocal opponents.

And as such, the comments in the "Apologia" roundtable simultaneously provide a useful way to think about the back and forth between Minsk and Moscow over a new union state and a hopeful sign that despite all his efforts, Lukashenka and those who back him may soon prove to be on the losing side of history.

Closing the Chapter Of Peaceful Coexistence

The EU has to overcome a dangerous but comfortable deadlock in its relations with Belarus.

By Ian Thomas Klinke

In its policy towards Belarus, the European Union (EU) has alternated between general disinterest on the one hand and insufficient policies combined with public disapproval of the Lukashenka regime on the other. As a result, the EU has failed to achieve its goal – to enforce democracy in Belarus.[1] Moreover, the EU's policy has contributed to Belarusian self-isolationism towards the West and has fostered the country's re-integration with the Russian Federation. Before discussing the prospects and dangers of future actions, the reasons for the failure of the Union's policy towards Belarus have to be explored.

Dominant forces behind the EU's foreign policy towards Belarus

After a short period of concern with Belarus in the early 1990s, the European Union's interest in Belarus declined and it became deeply preoccupied with the more promising Central European region. This initial attention was a response to remaining Soviet nuclear warheads in the country, which Belarus willingly gave up, thus indirectly encouraging neglect from the side of the EU as the security threat disappeared.[2] Additionally, the EU's lack of concern and involvement has been rooted in the country's relative geo-strategic unimportance and the insignificance of its economy, largely tied to the Russian economy. Furthermore, the neglect has been intensified by the anticipation that Belarus might return into Russia's fold and the EU should therefore not interfere with Russia's 'internal affairs'. Besides the above reasons for presuming the EU to be a unitary actor, it is also important to point to the inter-governmental character of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Different positions of EU Member States and the opportunity to hide their lack of concern behind the smokescreen of EU competence have also contributed to the indifferent character of the EU's approach. It can be claimed that the persistent absence of a coherent strategy towards Belarus not only reflects the well-known difficulties in dealing with the uncooperative Lukashenka regime, but is also an outcome of precisely this indifference resulting from a variety of causes. Although the failure of the EU has to be assessed against the background of Belarus' obstinate foreign policy after the 1994 elections, this should not serve as an excuse, since the European Union and its Member States could have taken this circumstance into closer consideration.

What attempts did the EU make?

One of the turning points in mutual relations was the conclusion of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA).[3] What should have been a vertex in the EU's relations with Belarus, failed because it was clearly not conceived for collaboration with a leader like Alexandr Lukashenka. Designed in 1993 to govern the EU's relations with the successor states of the USSR, the PCA with Belarus covered economic issues, but also set out to encourage democratic transition, promote human rights and establish the rule of law. In short, this agreement had nothing to offer for Lukashenka, who after coming to power in 1994 moved swiftly to create the regime he has gained notoriety for. From the beginning of his rule, Lukashenka perceived any form of Western intervention in Belarusian internal politics as intended to undermine his personal powers and therefore opted for an aggressive anti-Western position that became manifest in speeches and the absence of cooperative moves towards the EU. Eventually, after the 1997 changes to the Belarusian Constitution – declared illegitimate by the Belarusian Constitutional Court, the European Union and the United States – Belarus' special guest status in the Council of Europe was cancelled, making Belarus' isolation unequivocal to the world public.[4]

The European Union came to the conclusion that it could force the Belarusian government to abide by democratic principles by further isolating it, using measures such as the 2002 visa ban for high-ranking Belarusian officials. Nevertheless, this only encouraged Lukashenka to foster Russo-Belarusian reintegration and resulted in a further deterioration of mutual relations, which had already become evident in the co-called 'Drazdy affair'.

Supposedly representing a fresh approach, the EU's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)[5] towards Belarus was to serve as an instrument to facilitate a successful 'benchmark' policy. Belarusian concessions concerning basic democratic principles, human rights issues and the rule of law were to be rewarded with beneficial treatment from the EU under the ENP. In theory ENP's objective was not only to encourage the introduction of democratic principles, which could destabilise Lukashenka's political power, but also to promote the transition to a free market economy that would deprive the governing elite of its economic grip on the country. Similarly to the PCA, the ENP showed little progress, since – yet again – it is not a policy that is effective to manipulate authoritarian rulers like Lukashenka, as the decision whether to cooperate is essentially left to him

Whilst the Lukashenka regime remains isolated, the EU and Belarus have entered a dangerous symbiosis. The European Union can silence media and NGOs by hiding behind mere criticism of human rights abuses in Belarus, and Lukashenka can peacefully foster his anti-EU policy, which relies on the EU alongside the United States as an anti-Belarusian constant. Recent attempts to pressurise Lukashenka on the eve of the upcoming elections reveal: the European Union has not yet found a conclusive long-term strategy. Though repeating its dissatisfaction with the democratic situation in Belarus, the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting in Brussels in November 2005[6] failed

to agree upon any concrete measures to enforce its values on Lukashenka.

Finding a new approach

Many observers have criticised the EU's underlying rationale that Belarus lies within the Russian sphere of interest as reflecting archaic Cold War geo-strategic thinking.[7] However, geo-strategic considerations are not as outdated as some may wish. Although Belarus and the other countries of the 'near abroad' clearly remain within the Russian orbit, this does not mean that the West cannot penetrate this sphere. Recent developments in Ukraine and the enlargement of NATO – especially including the Baltic States - have shown that Russia may retreat in return for economic and political concessions from the West. In contrast to a confrontational approach of unhinging Belarus from Russian domination, some claim that Russia is the only key to effectively exerting pressure on Belarus. So far, Vladimir Putin has shown that he is willing to accept the international embarrassment of being an ally to Lukashenka as long as the Belarusian President acts in Russia's interest. Nevertheless, recent events like the so-called 'gas war' [8] and remarks of high-ranking Russian officials[9] have shown that there is disagreement amongst the 'Slavic brothers'. Using such tensions to drive a wedge between Belarus and Russia could either totally isolate Belarus – which should not be an option - or be a chance to make it compliant. Due to its ties with Russia, Belarus is bound to remain a special case within Eastern Europe. Statements that compare the Deutsche Welle broadcasting to Belarus in the Russian language to broadcasting to the Netherlands in German[10] are inaccurate and neglect part of the problem – the absence of a strong national movement. **Nevertheless, the contemporary state of affairs need not necessarily prevent the European Union from actively strengthening Belarusian national identity as a means to promoting democracy by emancipating the country from a Russia that has helped to stabilise Belarusian authoritarianism.** Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that such policies might not be in line with a Russophile public and therefore contain potential for conflict.

Assessing concrete measures

One of the most discussed measures is the employment of economic sanctions.[11] As general sanctions contain the danger of mainly hurting the population whilst often stabilising the regime, in Belarus there is an indication that they could mainly harm small- and medium-sized enterprises, which should not be in the EU's interest. Nevertheless, the possibility of extending asset freezes and the enhancement of visa bans for high-ranking officials, upon which the EU failed to decide at the November 2005 General Affairs Council Meeting, should be considered, as such sanctions would only reach the governing elite whilst sparing the population.

The European Union could clearly support opposition candidate Milinkevich in the run up to the upcoming elections - a strategy that proved viable in Ukraine's 2004 elections. However, it has to be noted that such financial and political support only forms part of a short-term strategy that should not be relied on as an exclusive solution. Moreover, the European Union has to complement it **by supporting oppositional media on a long-term scale** and engaging in the construction of a robust civil society in Belarus. For this purpose, the EU's funding through TACIS (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent Sates) has proven insufficient, since it is only intended for states that cooperate within the legal framework of the European Union – a criterion that certainly does not apply in the case of Belarus. Therefore, TACIS must be supported by **an external fund** that can operate outside the narrow TACIS framework. [12]

Up until today, the EU has done little to facilitate multi-level dialogue and promote itself directly to the Belarusian society. The establishment of a Commission representation in Minsk only serves as a first step and would have to be followed by others. **European exchange programmes between Belarusian and EU Member States' universities could serve as an instrument for upgrading the Union's image and should thus be extended.[13] The easing of visa restrictions for Belarusian citizens also outlines a part of such an approach**, though it would most likely come into conflict with the EU's restrictive migration policies. The question remains as to whether the European Union should uphold public pressure, as some observers claim.[14] As discussed above, such statements have helped to create the deadlock the European Union now wishes to break. Maybe the EU would be well advised to cease from its well-rehearsed but insufficient strategy of simply condemning the regime and **finally start pursuing a more pragmatic approach.** Whilst the success of such a strategy would serve both the Belarusian people and the foreign political goals of an enlarged European Union, it would obliterate the current comfortable symbiosis.

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Amendments Proposed to Criminal Code in Belarus

By David Marples

The Lukashenka government in Belarus has taken several steps to ensure that there are no unexpected setbacks in the 2006 presidential election campaign. On November 23, the president proposed several amendments to the Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure that, if accepted into law, will have a fundamental impact both on the election campaign and on activities of all residents of the republic.

On November 25, the lower house of Parliament met to consider the draft law "On Addenda and Changes of Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Belarus to Increase Responsibility for Actions Directed Against an Individual and Public Safety." The draft was introduced by chairman of the KGB, Stepan Sukharenka and headlined "Urgent." Evidently the draft came as a complete surprise to many MPs, and it was accepted by 94 votes to 1 (there are 110 seats in the House of Representatives), and must now be resubmitted for a second vote within ten days (*Belorusy i rynok*, November 28).

The draft extends and broadens activities that are subject to criminal charges and proposes to apply them to anything that can harm the national security of Belarus. First of all, these pertain to actions using weapons and explosives, but also to activity against the state and the ruling order that might create the preconditions for foreign political pressure on the state, as well as for other crimes directed against the "constitutional rights and freedom of citizens."

What are these preconditions? Those organizations that were warned to stop activities or face liquidation, but continued to operate, will be fined or arrested for up to six months, or be deprived of freedom for two years. Training and other preparations for "mass disorders" or funding such actions may results in arrests for up to six months or deprivation of liberty for up to three years. An identical penalty would face those who appeal for seizure of state power or to change the constitution, as well as for appeals to foreign states or international organizations. If such appeals are disseminated through the mass media, the punishment is arrest for two to five years.

A proposed new article in the Criminal Code is devoted to "Defamation Of the Republic of Belarus," i.e., "providing a foreign state or a foreign or international organization with false materials on the political, social, military, or international situation..." Those who carry out such actions face arrest for up to six months and deprivation of freedom for two years. People suspected of terrorist activity or hooliganism may be detained for ten days under these same proposals.

The vagueness of some of the proposals gives the authorities much room for maneuver. According to one analyst, it is now possible for citizens who appeal to the OSCE, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, or the Strasbourg Court to receive a prison sentence of between six months and two years. The same fate would befall any journalist who writes something critical about the president or his circle of advisors (*Izvestiya*, November 28). And the question arises as to what would constitute false materials on the political or social situation in the republic? Who would be the arbiter or judge of such writings or statements? Alexander Milinkevich, the united opposition's candidate for the 2006 presidential elections, commented that the amendments represent a "return to Stalinism" and "the final stage of the regime's preparations for the elections, with the goal of finding easier ways to punish people who express dissatisfaction with Lukashenka's policies" (*Belorusy i rynok*, November 28; *Pravda.Ru*, November 26).

Representatives of the human rights movement of Belarus, like most opposition politicians, were forthright in their condemnation of the bill, maintaining that the proposed changes violate both the constitution of the country and international law as ratified by the republic. The changes "violate the fundamental principles of human rights, such as freedom of opinion and belief, the freedom to receive and distribute information, the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, etc." (Cited in *Charter 97*, November 30).

Several questions now arise. The first is whether any opposition candidate can possibly mount a significant campaign should such amendments be accepted into law since he/she and his/her supporters would immediately be subject to arrest. The second is whether the bill will serve as the death knell for the election altogether, because it strengthens the position of those opposition leaders who maintain that a boycott is preferable to participation in an election under duress. And the third is whether there is any conceivable means of preventing the new bill from becoming law. After the second reading, it must be adopted by the upper house (Council of the Republic), after which it is signed by the head of state. The meek acceptance of the first reading by the lower house suggests that little discussion about or opposition to its contents will be forthcoming next week.

The proposals, as several observers point out, indicate nervousness on the part of the president and a manifest lack of confidence regarding his support in the country. Lukashenka intends to intimidate his opponents and rule by fear.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, December 2, 2005

Ukraine on geopolitical crossroad

By Alesya Semukha

CIS is history. Belarus, if it continues to orient itself on outdated political concepts, will slip off the active political scene in Eastern Europe. Ukraine and the rest of the region will continue their search for new regional political and economic alliances.

These were the two major discussion points made at a roundtable session "Ukraine in a Regional Context" at the conference "Ukraine's Quest for Mature Nation Statehood: Roundtable VI". The conference took place on September 27-28, 2005 in Washington, DC. The two-day event brought together government and key non-government representatives of Ukraine, the Unites States and several of Ukraine's neighbors, including Belarus, as well as experts from the world of academia to evaluate Ukraine's ability to define a "distinct sense of place in world affairs"in the aftermath of the "Orange Revolution"?.

The discussion demonstrated that Ukraine is on the crossroads of defining its identity and its role in the region. While being tied to Russia economically, Ukraine's political and economic aspirations are nevertheless directed toward the West. On this journey, Ukraine is trying to find new friends, like Georgia and the Baltic countries, and forge a new alliance, like GUAM in order to establish its independence from Russia on issues of energy and regional conflict resolution. Whether these new alliances will develop and strive is still an open question. But in any case, Russia's monopoly on political domination in the region has been shaken, if not broken. Ukraine slowly emerges as a new regional political center to which at least some neighbors may gravitate. This is especially true, as relationship with Russia becomes more of a bilateral effort. Russia can no longer be the leader of regional unions and pacts. CIS, as agreed by all presenters, needs to be replaced by more dynamic alliances.

The subject of Ukraine-Belarus relationship was brought up as a part of the discussion about the role of Ukraine in democratizing the region. The US Department of State representative Marcus Micheli welcomed the spread of Ukraine's example of electoral revolution and said that Ukraine could become a role model for a successful democratic transformation in neighboring Belarus. Mr. Vitali Silicki, International Forum/Democratic Studies Fellow from Belarus, was less optimistic and said that the consequences of the Orange Revolution for Belarus are dubious. On one hand, events in Ukraine brought hope and spirit of democracy. On the other hand, Lukashenka's regime responded to the Orange Revolution with even more repressions toward the opposition and the media. It remains to be seen, said Silicki, whether the painful consolidation process and democracy will succeed in Ukraine.

(Silicki) "We should realize that Ukraine's ability to spread democracy to Belarus is very limited. First, it is because political change that took place a year ago is still volatile and unsettled. We have to wait for the results of next year's parliamentary elections in Ukraine. If the 'Orange Revolution' coalition wins majority of seats, then we can talk about possible substantial influence even if it is blocked by Lukashenka's regime.

Second, Ukraine's influence will be contingent upon establishing strategic relations with Europe and the United States. Without their support it will be difficult to count on Ukraine for democracy promotion in the region."

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

October 3, 2005

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PICKS 2006 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Opponents of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka held a congress of pro-democratic forces in Minsk on 1-2 October at which they elected Alyaksandr Milinkevich as their candidate for the 2006 presidential election, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. Milinkevich edged out United Civic Party Chairman Anatol Lyabedzka for the nomination with 399 votes versus Lyabedzka's 391. "I will not promise you victory," Milinkevich said after the vote, "[but I can promise that] I will go forward with you to the very end. I will be with you in the public squares." Milinkevich, 58, holds a doctorate in physics and mathematics but has been a civil-society activist for most of the past decade, leading the Ratusha nongovernmental organization (1996-2003) and the Belarusian Association of Resource Centers (after 1998). Milinkevich previously worked with the Physics Institute of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences and the University of Hrodna in western Belarus, and served as deputy head of the Hrodna Oblast Executive Committee from 1990-96. Apart from Belarusian and Russian, he speaks English, French, and Polish.

October 13, 2005

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MOVES TO FORM PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN TEAM

Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists, will lead the 2006 presidential campaign headquarters for Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the candidate recently nominated by an opposition congress , BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 12 October. Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, will head the National Committee— essentially a shadow cabinet — that will devise a proposed development strategy and other aspects of Milinkevich's campaign platform. Agreements to this effect were reached on 12 October during the first meeting of the Political Council, a body formed by opposition forces after Milinkevich's selection. "Democratic activists are to do an extremely difficult but necessary job," Milinkevich said at the meeting. "When people in our country learn about the true situation in Belarus, they will see that a majority in the country wants changes for the better. A key objective of pro-democracy forces is to help people overcome fear."

October 17, 2005.

BELARUSIANS SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH POLITICALLY OPPRESSED COMPATRIOTS

People in Minsk and other Belarusian cities lit candles in their windows in the evening of 16 October to mark a 'Day of Solidarity' with politically oppressed compatriots and the families of missing opposition activists, BelaPAN and the Charter-97 web site (http://www.charter97.org) reported. The action came in response to appeals to participate from Iryna Krasouskaya, wife of "disappeared" businessman Anatol Krasouski; journalist Iryna

Khalip; and opposition youth activist Mikita Sasim. Small rallies to support democracy in Belarus were held the same day in Warsaw and Kyiv. Students at six universities in the U.S. states of California, Michigan, Massachusetts, Indiana, and Washington organized marches on 16 October in support of democracy in Belarus.

October 18, 2005

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION APPROVES ELECTION-HEADQUARTERS MAKEUP

The Political Council of Pro-democratic Forces, a coordinating body of the Belarusian opposition, on 17 October adopted the structure of the campaign headquarters of Alyaksandr Milinkevich, an opposition candidate in the 2006 presidential election, BelaPAN reported. Syarhey Kalyakin, manager of Milinkevich's presidential campaign, is to have three deputies. One of them will coordinate the activities of provincial campaign headquarters and take responsibility for the distribution of campaign materials and the organization of various mass events. Another will be in charge of information support to the candidate and his public relations strategy. The third will be responsible for Milinkevich's foreign contacts.

November 14, 2005

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL COURTS RUSSIAN BUSINESSMEN, LAWMAKERS

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the Belarusian opposition's choice to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the 2006 presidential election, met with Russian businessmen and lawmakers in Moscow on 10 November, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported, quoting Milinkevich's spokesman Syarhey Vaznyak. "It was noted during the meeting [with Russian businessmen] that Russia is interested in large investments in the Belarusian economy, but this will become possible only after the political regime in the country changes," Vaznyak said. Later the same day, Milinkevich and his election staff manager, Syarhey Kalyakin, met with leaders of the State Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations wh itCompatrio tss.According to Vaznyak, Milinkevich and Kalyakin told Russian lawmakers that the Belarusian-Russian relationship should be based on pragmatic approaches aimed at ensuring the well-being and equal rights of the population in the two countries. Vaznyak also said that while commenting on the possibility of a referendum on the Belarusian-Russian Union State's Constitutional Act, Milinkevich and Kalyakin stressed that given Belarus' practice of conducting referendums and elections, the free expression of the Belarusian people's will is out of the question and that is why the outcome of such a referendum will hardly be recognized as legitimate both within Belarus and abroad.

November. 18, 2005

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL LAUNCHES WEB SITE

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition's challenger to Belarusian President Lukashenka in next year's election, on 16 November launched his website at **http://www.milinkevich.org**, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. The website contains Milinkevich's biography, his campaign headquarters organization, his recent interviews, articles about the candidate, a photo gallery, and official documents of the National Congress of Democratic Forces.

November 23, 2005

SPLIT BETWEEN BELARUSIAN WRITERS WIDENS

The leadership of the Union of Belarusian Writers (SBP) on 22 November spoke in favor of excluding those SBP members who took part in last week's foundation of a rival organization — the government-sponsored Union of Writers of Belarus, BelaPAN reported. SBP Chairman Ales Pashkevich said 53 of his organization's 582 members participated in the convention of the rival union, but none of them has so far filed an official request to quit the SBP.

November 29, 005

BELARUSIAN PROSECUTORS DROP SLANDER CASE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

The Minsk city prosecutor's office has dropped a slander case against human rights advocate Hary Pahanyayla that was reopened in May), BelaPAN reported on 28 November. Pahanyayla, a deputy chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, was accused of slandering President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and other officials during an interview last year with a Swedish television station. Pahanyayla said in the interview that Lukashenka, along with former Prosecutor General Viktar Sheyman, former Sports Minister Yury Sivakou, and Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau, might be involved in the disappearances of three opposition figures and a journalist in Belarus in 1999 and 2000."[City prosecutors said] that I slandered no one, which means that all I said in the interview was true," Pahanyayla told the agency. "We can keep on suspecting the officials of involvement in the disappearances and demand that they be subjected to questioning""

2. REGIME ACTIONS and STATEMENTS

October. 4, 2005

BELARUSIAN MINISTER EXPLAINS DIRECTIVE TO EXPEL 'POLITICIZED' STUDENTS

Education Minister Alyaksandr Radzkou told lawmakers in the Chamber of Representatives on 3 October that one of his ministry's duties is to ensure that the educational process is not "politicized," BelaPAN reported. Radzkou was commenting on a directive he issued in May, according to which educational institutions can expel students who participate in opposition demonstrations. Radzkou claims the directive does not infringe on students' constitutional rights. "[Students] have the right to participate in political life, [but schools are not the proper place] to declare their approaches and political views," he reportedly said, according to BelaPAN. The classified directive — "On Measures to Prevent Attempts to Involve University and School Students in Illegal Political Activities" — instructs educational institutions to conduct an investigation into any case of student participation in an unauthorized demonstration staged by opposition groups and take disciplinary action that could include expulsion.

Oct.ober 4, 2005

..AND INTRODUCES NEW BILL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Education Minister Radzkou introduced a bill on higher education to the Chamber of Representatives on 3 October that, if enacted, would empower the education minister to appoint and dismiss the heads of private institutions of higher education, Belapan reported. The bill proposes a two-stage system of higher education. The first stage would take four to five years, with another year or two of training to complete a master's degree. The

bill also stipulates a two-year compulsory job assignment for university graduates. All graduates would be obliged to sign contracts with universities and would be required to reimburse education costs if they fail to work at a designated location for two years. Radzkou said there are currently 360,000 students enrolled in Belarusian institutions of higher learning, including 300,000 in state-run facilities.

Oct. 5, 2005

BELARUSIANS TO CONTINUE TO APPLY FOR FOREIGN-TRAVEL PERMIT

The Belarusian Constitutional Court on 4 October extended indefinitely the deadline for scrapping the country's Soviet-era foreign-travel permit system, BelaPAN reported. Belarusian citizens currently need to obtain a passport stamp to travel abroad. They have to fill out a special form and pay a fee of 127,500 rubles ($60) for a five-year travel permit. In 2002, the Constitutional Court recommended abolishing travel permits as of January 2006, arguing that the requirement infringes on citizens' constitutional right to freedom of movement. However, the government asked the court to extend the deadline, noting that it had failed to compile a computer database of persons subject to travel restrictions.

October 7, 2005

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT TOUTS AGRICULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at a harvest festival in Slutsk, Minsk Oblast, on 8 October that Belarus has created a fundamentally new agricultural sector over the last decade, Belapan reported. Lukashenka said that despite this year's violent windstorms and heavy rains, which damaged more than 70 percent of grain and other crops, Belarus managed to save the harvest and preserve the past few years' upward trend in agricultural output. This year's grain crop exceeded 7 million tons, he said, with an average yield of 3.1 tons per hectare. "We don't have to panhandle around the world for food to import," Lukashenka added.

October 10, 2005

BELARUS EXPECTS 7-8 PERCENT ECONOMIC GROWTH IN 2006

Economy Minister Mikalay Zaychanka said at a government conference in Minsk on 19 October that the country's economy is expected to grow by 7-8 percent next year, BelaPAN reported. The government also estimates that the average monthly wage will increase to the equivalent of $300 by the end of 2006. Finance Minister Mikalay Korbut said the government plans to reduce the overall tax burden by 0.8 percent and to simplify the tax system in 2006. A study titled "Doing Business in 2006 --Creating Jobs," released by the World Bank and the International Financial Corporation in September, ranked Belarus 154th among 155 countries regarding ease of paying taxes. According to the study, the effective tax that a medium-sized company in Belarus has to pay within a year is equal to 121.8 percent of its gross profit, while entrepreneurs in Belarus must make 113 tax payments .

November 4, 2005

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT BOOSTS OWN ECONOMIC PREROGATIVES

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree that gives him the final say in the economic sphere, including on key budget, tax, and monetary issues, BelaPAN reported on 3 November, quoting the presidential press service. In particular, Lukashenka will decide on support for companies and individual entrepreneurs, preferential treatment, and state programs concerning the protection and use of land, forests, water, vegetation, animals, air, and natural resources. Some of the decree's provisions take effect 10 days after its official publication, while the full document will be effective on 1 June 2006.

November 4, 2005

...AND GIVES PREFERENCE TO PRO-GOVERNMENT TRADE UNIONS

The Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) has condemned as discriminatory last month's presidential decree that allowed the pro-government Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) to use government-owned premises free of charge, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 3 November. In particular, the document allows the FPB to use such premises for meetings, offices, clubs, and other activities. The BKDP says the decree runs counter to the country's constitution and the law that stipulates that all trade unions must enjoy equal rights.

November. 14, 2005

BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT TIGHTENS CONTROLS ON PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Last week the Belarusian government issued a directive requiring that all pollsters that plan to conduct surveys concerning national referendums, presidential and parliamentary elections, and the political situation in the country, and then make public their results through mass media, should apply for accreditation to a special panel under the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences, Belapan reported on 13 November. The directive authorizes the panel to "exercise control over the activity of an accredited legal entity at any stage of taking a public opinion poll" The panel also has the right to revoke accreditation if it detects irregularities in the activities of a pollster, or if released poll results are regarded as "biased and unreliable." Central Election Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna welcomed the directive as instrumental in clamping down on surveys aimed at what she termed as "manipulating public sentiments." The panel, established by the government in May 2002, consists of 15 experts representing the Central Election Commission, the Information and Justice ministries, and the Belarusian Association of Sociologists.

November 18, 2005

PRESIDENT PRAISES DOMESTIC TELEVISION

President Lukashenka also told students in Mahilyou on 17 November that Belarus' state-run television provides more truthful coverage than foreign television networks, BelaPAN reported, quoting official sources. Lukashenka slammed foreign television channels for broadcasting what he considers to be violent content. However, he said their broadcasts to Belarus will not be barred as "most of our people would not support it" Lukashenka said Belarusian television, unlike foreign networks, is not filled with violent scenes. He expressed his wish that Belarusian television reporters, whom he described as "decent, honest, and truthful," gain a bit more professionalism. Lukashenka said the government will continue interfering in the media sector but will do

it in a "civilized manner."

November 23., 2005
BELARUSIAN CHIEF BANKER BOASTS OF STRONG NATIONAL CURRENCY

Belarusian National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich told President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 22 November that the Belarusian ruble has been "steadily strengthening" throughout this year, Belarusian Television reported. "The exchange rate of the Belarusian currency has been set up on a firm foundation -- on economic growth and continued increase of our foreign exchange and gold reserves," Prakapovich said. "The hard-currency reserves of the National Bank have exceeded $1.5 billion according to the national exchange rate." The official exchange rate of the Belarusian ruble in Minsk is 2,150 per $1.

November 2, 2005
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS WEST WANTS HIM TO WITHDRAW FROM ELECTION

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka told the leadership of the Belarusian National Assembly on 24 November that the West is ready to offer safety guarantees and money to him and his family for his refusal to run in the 2006 presidential election, Belapan reported. "I want you to know that I've made up my mind and am not going to be sitting still somewhere for any money," Lukashenka's press office quoted him as saying. Lukashenka also denied the media allegations that the presidential administration is in the process of creating a movement that will become the basis of a "party of power" to reflect broader public support for his reelection for a third term in 2006.

November 29, 2005
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT DISMISSES IDEA OF COUNTRY'S ISOLATION AS 'SIMPLY RIDICULOUS'

President Lukashenka has told Chinese journalists that Belarus is not an isolated country, Belarusian Television reported on 28 November. Lukashenka was being interviewed by Chinese media ahead of his trip to China on 4-7 December. "We are often criticized by those who say Belarus has allegedly become isolated because some European countries have a cool attitude toward our country and the United States is blocking Belarus" Lukashenka said. "To this I reply unambiguously that we have good relations with China, Russia, India, the Middle East, and many countries in Latin America and Africa. So it's simply ridiculous to speak of any isolation."

December 2, 2005
BELARUSIAN LOWER HOUSE APPROVES TOUGH PUBLIC-SECURITY BIL.

The Chamber of Representatives on 2 December voted 97 to four to approve in the second reading amendments to the Criminal Code that stipulate tough penalties for activities "directed against people and public security", BelaPAN reported. In particular, the bill proposes penalizing people with jail terms of up to two years for "providing a foreign country, or a foreign or international organization with patently false information about the political, economic, social, military, and international situation of the Republic of Belarus." The bill has been criticized by Belarusian human rights activists and opposition figures as repressive and intending to gag criticism of the government ahead of the 2006 presidential election. "The adoption of the bill means that a de facto state of emergency has been declared in Belarus," a former Constitutional Court Judge Mikhail Pastukhou told RFE/RL"s Belarusian Service on 1 December. "I see no apprehensions connected with the adoption of the bill.... You do not say anything bad about your family, wife, and children in public. So you should not say anything bad about your country as well" Deputy Justice Minister Alyaksandr Petrash told Belarusian journalists the same day.

December 6, 2005
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRATIC CHOICE HAS NO FUTURE

.President Lukashenka told journalists in Beijing on 6 December that the Community of Democratic Choice, which was formally set up in Kyiv last week, has no "prospects" or "future" BelaPAN reported. "If you have chosen the so-called democracy, then follow your way," Lukashenka said about the nine countries that created the community. "Why come up against the East and go to the West? First, nobody needs them in the West. The EU must chew up, digest the East European countries that joined it recently. Second, what will they bring to the West? Criminality, brigandage, banditry? Will they show how to come to power in an unconstitutional way? Europe does not want that."

December 8, 2005
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WANTS TO 'HOOK' ECONOMY TO 'CHINESE BULLDOZER'

Belarusian Television's main newscast on 7 December hyped the political and economic results of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's visit to China on 4-6 December as "unprecedented." Lukashenka said earlier this week that an economic windfall resulting from his visit to China will amount to some $500 million. "The main purpose of this visit is to hook our economy to this powerful Chinese bulldozer to make China pull us and the well-being of our people a little bit ahead," Lukashenka told Belarusian journalists in Beijing. "In general, this visit is distinctive by the fact that I came here as to Russia, as to my own home. Russia has never been foreign to us. We are now building exactly the same relations with China." Meanwhile, the Warsaw-based *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported on 7 December that Lukashenka's trip to China has been completely ignored by China's English-language, international television channel CCTV-9. The daily added that Chinese President Hu Jintao spoke with Lukashenka in Beijing for one hour, "approximately as long as with the prime minister of Africa's Kingdom of Lesotho the previous day."

December 9, 2005
HEAD OF NEW UNION OF BELARUSIAN WRITERS STRESSES HIS SOVIET BACKGROUND

Mikalay Charhinets, head of the newly created Union of Writers of Belarus, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service on 8 December that he left his former organization, the Union of Belarusian Writers (SPB) led by Ales Pashkevich, because it has engaged in "antistate activities." According to Charhinets, the SPB does not recognize the red-green flag of Belarus approved by a referendum in 1995 and is against the Russia-Belarus Union. Charhinets also said he felt uncomfortable in the SPB because he was forced to speak Belarusian there. " I was brought up in a Russian-speaking environment and I have never considered myself Belarusian," Charhinets said. "The highest honor for me was to represent my country [the Soviet Union]. We, the young boys, wept with joy after we won somewhere abroad and the [Soviet] anthem was being played." The Union of Writers of Belarus is widely seen as a government-sponsored, ideology-driven alternative to the SPB,

which is portrayed in state media as a nationalistic organization that is hostile to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's policies.

December 9, 2005

BELARUSIAN LOWERHOUSE PASSES PARDON BILL

The Chamber of Representatives on 8 December approved in the second reading a bill of amendments to the Criminal Code that would allow the president to discharge offenders who have "voluntarily" indemnified for the damage or loss caused, Belapan reported. The bill, which was submitted by President Lukashenka, would allow the head of state to release from criminal responsibility those accused of committing crimes against state property or state and public interests without causing any harm to human health and life. To be entitled to a presidential pardon edict, a person would have to repent, cooperate with investigators, and indemnify for all losses and damages during a pretrial stage of criminal proceedings. Deputy Mikalay Dubovik noted in the debate that the bill would not apply to people who have committed a petty theft, but rather to people who"have stolen millions from the state." He added the bill runs counter to President Lukashenka's standing order that the government should introduce tighter punishment for corruption. Despite this objection, the lower house voted overwhelmingly to pass the legislation.

December 14, 2005

POLISH JOURNALIST DETAINED AT MINSK AIRPORT

Polish Television journalist Agnieszka Romaszewska was barred from entering Belarus at the Minsk international airport on 13 December and taken to a hostel there, BelaPAN and Polish Radio reported. Romaszewska, who reportedly had the appropriate accreditation and visa, arrived in Minsk on an assignment to open a correspondent bureau of Polish Television in the Belarusian capital. She was detained by border control officers who allegedly tried to put her on the same plane returning to Warsaw, but the crew captain refused to take her on board without an official deportation order. "She was denied entry to our country earlier. Despite the fact, she made another attempt to cross the border. Her actions were of provocative and unfriendly nature," Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ruslan Yesin said. Two days earlier, Romaszewska was traveling to Minsk together with a cameraman and a driver. After allegedly keeping them waiting for about 90 minutes, border guards said that Romaszewska was banned from entering the country, while her companions could continue their journey.

December 15, 2005

BELARUSIAN LOWER HOUSE ENDORSES ANTICORRUPTION BILL

The Chamber of Representatives on 14 December approved on first reading an anticorruption bill, BelaPAN reported. The bill would enlarge the list of those who can be prosecuted for corruption by adding foreign citizens, presidential candidates, and people who are not civil servants but serve public needs. Government officials would be banned from opening and keeping accounts with foreign banks and fulfilling orders coming from parties and nongovernmental organizations. The bill would also require officials and their family members to file annual income and property statements and notify the tax authorities about the sale or purchase of property worth more than $27,000.

December 15, 2005

AS PROSECUTOR-GENERAL SAYS CORRUPTION ENGULFS COUNTRY

Prosecutor-General Pyotr Miklashevich said in the Chamber of Representatives on 14 December that some 4,000 corruption cases were recorded in Belarus in the first 11 months of this year. He noted that corruption is not rare even among those whose duty is to combat it. Miklashevich told the deputies that the Supreme Court is soon to try a group of 46 individuals, including six law-enforcement officers and a KGB officer, which has been involved in illegal sales of alcohol. He also disclosed that prosecutors are soon expected to complete an investigation into the crimes committed by the so-called Marozau gang in Homel from 1990 to 2004. The gang, named after its leader Syarhey Marozau, reportedly included a police colonel and several other police officers.

3. REPRESSIONS

November 9, 2005

TWO BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS EXCLUDED FROM STATE SUBSCRIPTION CATALOGUE

Belarus' state postal service, Belposhta, has not included the private newspapers *Narodnaya volya* and *Salidarnasts* in its list of periodicals that can be subscribed to in 2006, Belapan reported on 8 November. *Narodnaya volya* Editor in Chief Svyatlana Kalinkina said the move is the continuation of an official harassment campaign against her daily. "They have put forward absolutely absurd grounds [to justify the subscription stoppage]," Kalinkina said. " For instance, they charged that we failed to notify Belposhta that we had changed the printer. It is unclear how this concerned the distributor, as the schedule of publication did not change and the volume remained the same." In September, a court ordered *Narodnaya volya* to pay nearly $50,000 in libel damages, while a state printing plant and distributor refused to print the daily and distribute it through a state monopoly network of kiosks and newsstands. "An era of the Internet and samizdat has begun for the non-state media," said *Salidarnasts* Editor in Chief Alyaksandr Starykevich .

November 15, 2005

MORE BELARUSIAN PRIVATE NEWSPAPERS REMOVED FROM STATE SUBSCRIPTION LIST

Belposhta, Belarus' state postal service, has not included the Belarusian-language weekly *Nasha Niva* in the state subscription catalogue for 2006, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 15 November. Belposhta, which holds a monopoly in disseminating the country's press through subscription, also barred a number of regional nonstate newspapers from its subscription list, including *Hazeta Slonimskaya, Volnaye Hlybokaye, Vitebskii kurer, Brestskii kurer, IntexPress*, and *Rehiyanalnaya hazeta*."This shows that there are no rules in the country and that there cannot be free elections in Belarus any longer," *Nasha Niva* Editor in Chief Andrey Dynko told RFE/RL. "This is also a crime against culture. The Belarusian-language periodicals account for some 10 percent of all periodicals [in Belarus], but they also account for 70 percent of all banned publications. This is the destruction of Belarusian culture." Last week, Belposhta excluded from its 2006 subscription catalogue three nonstate nationwide newspapers — *Narodnaya volya, Salidarnasts*, and *Zhoda*.

November 29, 2005

BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITY EXPELS STUDENT AFTER TRIP TO FRANCE

Uladzimir Shymau, rector of the Belarusian State Economic

University in Minsk, has expelled fourth-year student Tatsyana Khoma, accusing her of a "flagrant violation of internal regulations," BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 28 November. "The university administration has detected an unauthorized and unfounded trip by student Tatsiana Khoma to France and her stay in that country between 11-14 November 2005 during classes," Shymau wrote in the expulsion order. Khoma was simultaneously evicted from her dormitory. "There was a snowstorm that day and I believe it is outrageous to throw a person out onto the street in such weather," she said. While in the French city of Reims, Khoma was elected to the executive committee of the Brussels-based National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), an umbrella organization of 44 national student unions from 34 countries. More than 3,000 students from 40 countries have reportedly signed an ESIB petition urging Shymau to reinstate Khoma.

December 2, 2005
BELARUSIAN PROSECUTORS INTERROGATE PROMINENT SOCIOLOGIST

Belarusian investigators on 1 December questioned Professor Aleh Manayeu, head of the Vilnius-based Independent Institute for Socioeconomic and Political Studies (NISEPI), in connection with his recent press articles about the popularity ratings of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. NISEPI was forced to move to Lithuania after Belarusian authorities closed down the polling agency in April. NISEPI participated in conducting an independent exit poll during the October 2004 constitutional referendum, which suggested that Lukashenka actually lost the plebiscite and should not run for a third term in 2006. Last month the Belarusian government issued a directive requiring that all pollsters who plan to conduct surveys concerning national referendums, presidential and parliamentary elections, and the political situation in the country, and then make public their results through mass media, should apply for accreditation to a special panel under the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences. "Someone in the top echelons of power is trying to do everything possible to prevent all poll results, apart from those obtained by government-controlled pollsters, from being published in the press," Manayeu told RFE/RL.

4. BELARUS in WORLD FOCUS

November 15, 2005
U.S. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT ANTI-AMERICAN CAMPAIGN IN BELARUSIAN STATE MEDIA...

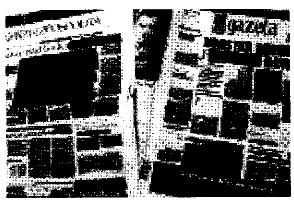
U.S. Ambassador to Belarus George Krol told journalists in Minsk on 15 November that Belarus' state media alleges on a daily basis that the United States desires to destabilize the situation in the country, stir up a revolution, and subject the Belarusians to America's "imperial" will, BelaPAN reported. Krol noted that government-controlled media outlets portray U.S. diplomats as spies whose only aim is to destabilize Belarus. The ambassador also said the state media does not inform the public but seeks to turn the Belarusian public against the United States as well as the values of democracy and free choice. "We would like to see an independent, sovereign, democratic, and economically prosperous Belarus, as an equal partner addressing common challenges" Krol said. "What's so destabilizing about that?"

November 15, 2005
U.S. AMBASSADOR VOICES SKEPTICISM ABOUT FAIRNESS OF 2006 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

Ambassador Krol also told journalists in Minsk on 15 November that he doubts that Belarus' 2006 presidential election will be free and democratic, BelaPAN reported. Krol said the state media currently does not provide the Belarusian public with comments and news on events in the political sphere. He went on to say that the state media does not cover the activities of Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the opposition's single presidential candidate, and other opposition leaders. "This information blockade is disturbing," Krol added.

November 28, 2005
POLISH NEWSPAPERS BLACK OUT FRONT PAGES TO PROTEST CURBS ON PRESS FREEDOM IN BELARUS.

Two major Polish dailies, *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, blacked out large sections of their front pages on 23 November to follow an Amnesty International-led protest against media repression in Belarus, BelaPAN and international news agencies reported. A black marker was run through headlines, photographs, and text in the two newspapers, suggesting that a censor worked on them. At the bottom of the two front pages, Amnesty International ran a caption:"This is what freedom of speech looks like in Belarus" The dailies printed their front page in full on page three, and carried commentaries and reports about human rights abuses in Belarus


gazeta

December 1, 2005
MEDIA WATCHDOG INSISTS ON INQUIRY INTO DEATH OF BELARUSIAN JOURNALIST

Reporters Without Borders has condemned the 28 November decision by the Minsk district prosecutor's office not topen a criminal investigation into the death of journalis Vasil Hrodnikau in a letter to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka dated 30 November. "Vasil Hrodnikau was found dead in his appeartment in the Minsk suburbs on 18 October 2005. Investigators found blood stains on the wallpapers, and dried blood on the victim's head. A post mortem examinations revealed that death was caused by a blow with a blunt object" the letter reads. "We fear we will never know the exact circumstances of the death of Vasil Hrodnikau, as was unfortunately the case with two other journalists, Veranik Charkasava and Dmitry Zavadski," the watchdog said.

Charkasava was found murdered in her Minsk apartment on 20 October 2004, while Zavadski went missing at Minsk airport on 7 July 2000.

Belarusians Abroad

Presidential Candidate Appeared at Prague's Forum 2000

In October 2005 the Belarusian political opposition agreed on a single candidate to challenge the rule of President Alexander Lukashenka in next year's presidential elections.

Alexander Milinkevich, the man picked to run against "Europe's last dictator," traveled to Prague on October 10, 2005 at the invitation of former Czech president Vaclav Havel, who founded the Forum 2000 conference in 1996.

The conference was also attended by Brian Bennett - Great Britain's ambassador to Belarus ,Boris Nemtsov - a Russian politician and advisor to Ukraine's president Viktor Yushchenko, Bronislaw Geremek - former Polish foreign minister, Sergei Kovalev - the Russian human rights activist, and Peter Mares - Czech deputy prime minister.

Mr. Milinkevich was first to address the meeting and share with it his ideas and observations:

• The Belarusian-wide anti-regime coalition represents 10 political parties and over 200 independent associations.

• It has been years now, since our people were able to see on TV and hear on radio the leaders of the democratic opposition. Our main election weapon is the "door-to-door" campaign that proved to be effective in the past.

• We are often asked: "In the last several years Belarus has not experienced fair elections; votes are not being counted anymore - why do you bother taking part in such elections?" Yet we categorically oppose boycotting undemocratic elections. Our goal is to force the regime to hold transparent elections. If that doesn't happen, we will make people take to streets - to peacefully defend their rights.

• 60% of our people are ready for a change in the country's leadership, and are willing to work for it, even without recognizing an alternative. They will definitely vote for a credible candidate.

One sour note spoiled Mr. Milinkevich's appearance: his address was delivered in Russian, probably because the meeting's organizers did not bother to find an interpreter from Belarusian to one of the working languages of the conference. The Belarusian community in Prague is able to produce several people perfectly capable of translating Belarusian to either English or Czech.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"For me, Belarus is part of Europe, part of its cultural space."

Graham Watson, leader of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in European Parliament at a meeting with Belarusian and Ukrainian journalists, Brussels, October 11, 2005

BNR Rada Delegation in Brussels

The delegation was headed by Ivonka Survilla, the President of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile. It consisted of members of the BNR Rada Executive Council from the United States, Great Britain, the Czech Republic and Belgium. In meetings with a number of key leaders and offices of the European Union, the delegation informed them of the current activity and the historical background of the BNR Rada. It stressed the looming danger to Belarusian independence as a result of the proposed Russia-Belarus merger, actively promoted by Alexander Lukashenka. Considerable attention was devoted to international broadcasting to Belarus, given the almost total media monopoly by the regime, and the support for democratic forces in the country in advance of the upcoming presidential election.

Among those visited were the leaders of the major party groups in the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Poettering of the European People's Party / Christian Democrats, and Graham Watson of the Liberals / Democrats, as well as the Parliament's Vice-Chairman – Janusz Onyszkiewicz. Meetings were held with representatives of the EU Commission, and with key members of the General Secretariat of the EU Council. In meeting with the Director General of EuropeAid, the BNR Rada delegation learned of plans to redirect the TACIS program aid which in the past was channeled through the Belarusian government – to benefit the democratic forces in Belarus. This is in line with EU's earlier determination that the current Belarusian government is a dictatorship. The recently announced two million euro tender for international broadcasting into Belarus is the first step along those lines.

Demonstration in Brussels,

staged by representatives of Belarusian diaspora in Benelux countries, began on November 8, 2005, on the city's Shuman Place, next to the building of the Council of Europe. The strikers protested the political repressions by Lukashenka's regime in Belarus, and urged the EU structures to undertake more decisive measures against the totalitarian regime.

They demanded the immediate creation of an international commission to investigate the cause of "disappeared" Belarusian politicians, and more intensive efforts to free all political prisoners in Belarus.

The strike attracted attention and gained support from numerous deputies of the Europarliament , especially from its vice president Janusz Onyszkiewicz, and the Latvian Euro-deputy Aldis Kuskis.

The strikers were joined by visitors: Ms. Iryna Krasouskaya and Sviatlana Zavadzkaya from the civic initiative "We Remember," Ms. Volha Stuzynskaya - assistant to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Prof. Aleh Manayeu - head of the Institute for Socioeconomic and Political Studies (NISEPI), invited to Brussels by the Europarliament, Mr. Zmicier Pimienau - chairman of the Belarusian-European Union, based in Belgium, and Mr. Ihar Lazarchuk - representative of the BPF Party in the Benelux countries.

2005 Harvard Symposium

The Symposium titled *"The Arts, National Identity and Politics in Belarus"* was held at Harvard University's Barker Center October 13-15. It was organized in two sessions by Dr. Curt Woolhiser of Harvard, with material support of the Orsa Romano Cultural and Educational Foundation and various departments of the Harvard University.

The first session was devoted to Belarusian current literature and music. **Prof. Arnold McMillin** of London University presented an overview of Belarusian literature since 1994. He noted that even during these difficult times the country's literature continues to progress. He concluded that "with such talented writers, given better environment, Belarusian literature will find its deserved place in European and world literature."

Prof. Zina Gimpelevich of Waterloo University is the author of the recently published work about Vasil Bykau, the pre-eminent Belarusian writer of the part of the last century. Her talk dealt with the anti-authoritarian themes in Bykau's recent works written outside the country.

Prof. Maria Paula Survilla of Wartburg (Iowa) College gave an update on Belarusian popular music. Her Power Point presentation on the last fifteen years of Belarusian rock and roll included videos of a number of popular albums as well as audio clips of recent music.

Prof. Tom Bird of Queens College (CUNY) as the discussant gave generally favorable comments on all three presentations.

The next day's session addressed the current cultural, educational and political aspects of the life in Belarus. **Prof. Grigory Ioffe** of Radford Virginia) University where he specializes in Russian Geography, devoted his talk to the various political trends or projects in Belarus. He identified the first as Belarusian-speaking and pro-European, the second, as liberal Russian-speaking, and the third — most populous and not clearly defined, as "creole."

Prof. Iryna Vidanava of the Belarusian State University and Johns Hopkins University named her talk "The State vs. the Nation". She described the introduction of neo-Soviet ideology into the educational system, the wholesale re-writing of the country's history to suit the pro-Russian views of Belarus' dictator.

Prof. Elena Gapova of the recently banished European Humanities University of Minsk focused on new developments among Belarusian intellectuals which were based on a number of independent elite publications. She concluded that by drawing on Western intellectual and material resources, the country's intellectuals tended to promote capitalist and Western ideas.



Valzhyna Mort

The session's discussants **Prof. Timothy Snyder** of Yale University and **Vital Zajka** of the Yiddish Institute of Vilna Organization (YIVO) directed most of their critical remarks to the Ioffe and Gapova presentations.

The Symposium was complemented by the screening of the prize-winning film: ***Occupation: Mysterium,*** a documentary dealing with the complex situation of the WWII partisans in Nazi-occupied Belarus. This film has been banned in Belarus. An interesting addition to the overall program were poetry readings of some of her acclaimed works by a young Belarusian poet **Valzhyna Mort**, who now resides in Florida.

The Jakub Kolas Academic Theater of Vitsyebsk gave a number of performances at the Arsenal Center for the Arts in Watertown (MA) that accompanied the Harvard Symposium theme. The theater group then proceeded to the New York City area, where its stage plays **Chagall... Chagall** and **The Arrest** — a play about the tragic fate of the Belarusian educator and political figure Branislau Tarashkevich were enthusiastically received by the predominantly Belarusian-American audience.

The group picture on this page shows the actors of the latter play.



Photo by Joe Pecevich

Front row (left to right): Ryhor Shatsko (also the Theater's director), Iryna Tsishkevich, Tamara Skvartsova, Valiantsin Salauyou, Vital Barkouski (the play's director), Natalia Barodzich, Andzhela Barkouskaya.
Rear row (left to right): Yury Tsvirka, Viktar Dashkevich, Henadz Haiduk

Polish Channel TVP1 Starts Broadcasting News with TV-text in Belarusian

The main news program of TVP1 is broadcast at 8.30 P.M. daily. At the same time, this news is broadcasted by Polonia TV channel for foreign viewers. Now this news can be watched with Belarusian TV-text, printed in early Belarusian orthography, Tarashkievitsa, not recognized by the authorities. Polish TV decided to start this action in order to give Belarusians access to objective and independent information. According to Katarzyna Twardowska, this project will continue till Belarus will have enough independent media.**Source:** Charter'97 Press Center, December 8, 2005

MEDIA WATCH

New Books

Nicholas Lapitzki — In the Service of God and Belarus
Edited by Yury Garbinski

Published by the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences (New York) and the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw). In Belarusian with extensive bibliography, name index, and a 48 page introduction describing Father Lapitzki's difficult but fruitful life.

The book contains his sermons and prayers, academic works, articles, letters, recollections and reflections. Of particular interest is his work dealing with Belarusian Orthodox Church in the multinational Grand Duchy of Litva in the 14th and 15th centuries, and its centuries-long ties with the Constantinople Patriarchate. His interest in the independence of the Belarusian Church has remained dominant throughout his life.

When at the end of the 18th century Belarus was fully occupied and annexed by the Russian Empire, the imperial aim was the total russification of Belarus. A major part of this process was the total destruction of Belarusian Orthodox Churches canonical ties with Constantinople by subjugating it to Moscow under whose control it remained for a century. With some brief periods of autonomy, it stayed a part of the Russian church in Belarus, while in the diaspora, Belarusian Orthodox churches enjoy their independence.

Father Lapitzki's contribution in this respect is well documented in the book.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"The hypothetical defeat of the current government in Belarus would be the cruelest blow on Russia."

Alexander Lukashenka, addressing Russian journalists.

• • •

"Russian boot will not squash our social policy."

Alexander Lukashenka, addressing in Minsk a group of specially invited Russian journalists on November 23, 2005.

•••

And on the same occasion regarding the proposed Union:
"Only together can we be prosperous and secure."

Zina Gimpelevich: **Vasil Bykau: His Life and Works**
McGill – Queens University Press, 260 pages. With bibliography and name index.
The book contains such chapters:
Childhood; Youth; The War; Lieutenant Bykau's Prose; Partisan Novels; Scars of War; Politics of Freedom, and the Epilogue: Exile and the Long Way Home.

In the first English biography of his life and work, Zina Gimpelevich describes the conditions under which Bykau lived in the former USSR and provides a literary and political history of Belarus from 1918-2003. Based on interviews that she conducted with Bykau, she illuminates his life as an artist and a defender of human rights.

The Soviet Union banned many of Vasil Bykau's novels, which often focus on the agonizing moral dilemmas faced by young officers during the horrors of war.

Considered the best modern Belarusan writer and the last Eastern European literary dissident, Bykau (1924-2003) is referred to as the "conscience of a nation" for leading an intellectual crusade against Lukashenka's totalitarian regime. In exile from Belarus for several years, he was given refuge by Vaclav Havel in the Czech Republic. He has been nominated for the Nobel Prize by Vaclav Havel, Czeslaw Milosz, and PEN.

Review quotes:
"I hold Vasil Bykau in high regard as an opponent of totalitarian regimes in Belarus. During our encounters he never lost hope for positive changes in his country's future. I feel a certain correlation between our destinies and I regret that he was not lucky ebough to experience changes, unlike those of us in Czechoslovakia, Poland, or Hungary." — Vaclav Havel

"This timely biography is essential reading." — Arnold McMillin, professor of Russian Literature, University College, London.

Zina J. Gimpelevich is associate professor, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, University of Waterloo.

Press Review

The Denim Revolution (*The Economist*, November 19-25, 2005)
The opposition finds a new symbol

They may be gimmicks, but they are ingenious ones, all the same. Belarus's opposition, keen to pep up an apathetic public against the country's autocrat, Alexander Lukashenka, has hit on two new ideas. One is to invite citizens to mark the 16th of every month by turning off their lights and placing a candle in a window.

It's hard to ask people to do much more. Overt protest is risky, and dissidents risk their jobs, freedom or even lives. The first lights-out seemed a big success: supporters said over 100,000 people took part. This week's appeared, by early signs, to be just as popular.

The second idea is to adopt blue denim as the opposition's colour. Thus started in September when an opposition activist, Mikita Sasim, made a flag of his denim shirt — before being beaten unconscious by police. Belarus's democrats now hope that their search for a catchy image may be over: Ukraine had orange, Georgia chose rose, Kyrgyzstan adopted the tulip. Denim has the added advantage of having strong counter-cultural echoes: jeans in the Soviet era represented cultural freedom and western consumerism.

EU helping Belarus ? With money for Lukashenka's pioneers
(*Lidove Noviny, Prague*, by Katerina Safarikova, on November 25, 2005)

Minsk. Financial aid, provided by the European Union to support the democratic opposition against the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenka, often ends up in hands of his followers. The Tacis program, financed from the EU's budget, is responsible for an annual influx of millions of Euros to the country. One of the program's condition is that the activities its supports must be approved by Belarus' authorities.

"Thus the money is either received by the pro-regime organizations - since others are simply denied official registration, or it is returned to the EU budget" says Ales Michalevic, deputy chairman of the opposition party Belarusian Popular Front. He cites as an example last year's youth festival in the city of Homiel, that was co-financed by Tacis . " Almost 80% of the grant ended up in hands of Lukashenka's pioneers, who sponsored the event."

Due to growing criticisms, the European Commission this year shifted part of the financial aid for Belarus to a fund that doesn't require the approval of government authorities. It should primarily support non-governmental organizations and independent nedia. Independent radio broadcasting to Belarus should also begin next year; the European Commission announced a tender for this project in the amount of 2 million Euros. However, according to Michalevic, the scheduled broadcasting should be conducted first in Russian, and only then in Belarusian. "Our people can listen to a number of Russian-language radio stations. What is missing, is indepndent broadcasting in our language. Luka–shenka does his best to eradicate our native Belarusian language from people's heads. Every additional radio station in Russian serves his goal," says Michalevic.

As a very good idea he regards the project of a 24-hour Belarusian-language radio, to be implemented by Belarusian reporters from independent media, now closed by the Lukashenka's regime. Its headquarters should be in Poland, and it should be financed jointly by Poles, Lithuanians, Americans and Czechs. The Czech foreign ministry plans to contribute $80,000.

For the Czech Republic, the independent radio project is a part of broader assistance to Belarus. Along with Cuba, for instance, Belarus is now classified by the Czech diplomacy as one of the countries to which the Czech Republic intends direct financial aid and transmit its experience in transition from totalitarianism to democracy. For instance, recently the Czech embassy in Minsk ordered printing in Belarusian 100,000 copies of the U.N report on human rights violations in Belarus. It is distributing them now to the Belarusian public.

"We are providing mainly moral help to Belarusians by maintaining contacts with the democratic opposition and by sending our experts here," says Vladimir Ruml, Czech charge d'affairs in Minsk. "We are also trying to help in other matters. For instance, we are waving Czech visa fees for young Belarusians who intend to study in our country."

" Lukashenka keeps telling Belarusians that they remain isolated in Europe. Yet help from the Czechs shows that the democratic Europe has not forgotten us," says Michalevic.

Opposition leader says Belarusians ready for protests against vote-rigging (*Slovak newspaper SME*, by Petra Prochazkova, October 12, 2005)

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Belarusian opposition leader and presidential hopeful, has told a Slovak daily that many of his compatriots are prepared to take to the streets to protest against vote-rigging in the forthcoming presidential election. He said that they are tired of "living in fear" and will express their dissatisfaction in the same way Ukrainians did during the Orange Revolution in 2004. Milinkevich spoke against union with Russia, but added Belarus should cooperate with its eastern neighbour. Speaking about incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Milinkevich said he could not promise Lukashenka immunity from prosecution even if the president resigned voluntarily. The following is the text of the interview with Milinkevich by Petra Prochazkova.

"I am afraid, but I have been able to overcome this fear so far," said the man with a greyish beard, smiling. A pleasant and open companion, 58-year-old Alyaksandr Milinkevich does not give the impression of a revolutionary or a warrior from the barricades. However, he has entered a fight in which lives can be at stake. He has become the candidate of the opposition for the post of Belarus president and intends to meet with the person who is able to mercilessly liquidate his rivals - the current ruler of Belarus, President Aleksander Lukashenka.

Prochazkova[P.]: Aren't you afraid that you will meet with the same fate as people who stood up against Lukashenka, disappeared, and were probably physically liquidated?

Milinkevich[M.]: I would be a fool if I were not afraid. So far, I have found the courage to continue. I fear for my family. I encourage my children to be careful. However, what will you do if they kidnap your son and say: "He will be all right if you start to obey."

P: Then, why are you doing this?

M: I and many other people are aware that Belarus is in danger. This does not concern the political system, but the very existence of the independent state. People feel this. If you ask someone now whether they can speak their native language, they say: "Sorry, but I do not yet speak Belarusian." This is a big change. No-one said "sorry" before.

P: So you oppose the unification between Belarus and Russia?

M: This is Lukashenka's vision. When he became president, his further goal was to settle down in the Kremlin. It looks like a crazy idea today, but when Boris Yeltsin was Russian president, Lukashenka had great chances. He took advantage of the nostalgia for the Soviet Union, relying on less educated groups and villages. Now, he will not manage to carry out his ambition to become the ruler of a unified superpower. Therefore, he no longer wants unification, although he is pushing for it on the outside. The notion that he would only be prime minister of a new country does not satisfy him. For him, it is better to be the king of a small country than the second or third man in an empire.

P: Belarus is completely economically dependent on Russia. Isn't this the reason why so many Belarusians support the unification ?

M: Lukashenka has built the economy to be 100-percent dependent on the Russian market. We produce things that will only be bought in Russia. On the other hand, everyone has had enough of

the talk about unification. An opinion that we want to cooperate both with the East and the West is being spread in Belarus. No-one is calling for NATO entry, but the desire for an alliance with Russia is becoming weaker. I think that the notion of neutrality is prevailing. This is also my idea. Belarusians living in fear

P: Lukashenka will apparently not let you win the election without a fight. Will you be able to make people go out on the streets, as the current Ukrainian president managed to do?

M: In Ukraine, people took to the streets not for bacon and a leader, but because they had been humiliated. If Belarusians ever take to the streets, the reason will be the same. They will defend their own dignity and the future of their children. They are living in great fear today. It is greater than under Brezhnev. The state has made citizens totally dependent on it. Drink vodka or beer, but do not dabble in politics. However, the situation is changing slowly.

P: However, it is very difficult to change public opinion without being able to influence it through the media.

M: Only one person is allowed to engage in politics in this country. Lukashenka. After all, people do not even know the prime minister. Lukashenka appears on television every day and says what is good and what is bad. A joke is very popular in Belarus these days. Lukashenka speaks on the telephone: "Yes, like this, also like this, no, not like this, yes, like this." Then he puts down the receiver and sighs: "They are unable to even sort potatoes without me." Many people really think that if there is no Lukashenka, there will be nothing, not even potatoes.

P: This is precisely the reason why they will perhaps not want to take to the streets.

M: Many people know that they will be deceived again in the election. Therefore, they are prepared to take to the streets. Without stones or firearms.

P:Will the other side also have empty hands?

M: This cannot be assumed.

P: Let us suppose that you will manage to win. What will happen then?

M: Belarusians are saying today that they are not living very well, but it is not a disaster. The phrase that you hear most frequently is: "The main thing is that there is no war." We must convince citizens that if we win, we will not allow chaos, there will be no fights, explosions or assassinations. The opposition has united thanks to Lukashenka. This is why the communists and the democrats are cooperating today. If there is no Lukashenka anymore, a very difficult period will come. I see my task is that if I become president, my main goal will be a free parliamentary election.

P: What will you do with Lukashenka?

M: Lukashenka cannot be changed. As far as his fate is concerned, I do not intend to agree to the game that some people have proposed, that is, to offer him guarantees of safety if he resigns voluntarily. How can I forget about those who have disappeared without a trace? Only courts can say whether or not he is guilty. I cannot give any guarantees to anyone, as I do not know what he has done.

P: Aren't you afraid of a civil war?

M: Everyone heard Lukashenka when he said that he would defend himself even with a machine gun in his hands. None of us wants to die or shed blood. However, anything can happen. If you go to war, you must know that guns are fired there. I know that when we call on people to attend a demonstration, we are calling on them to take a risk. The idea that someone would die is terrifying to me. But I believe that people were not born to merely eat sandwiches and drink vodka. I consider certain things sacred.

P: The coloured revolutions that have taken place in former Soviet republics allegedly have their model in the Czech Velvet Revolution. Their leaders often refer to Vaclav Havel. Is he an inspiration to you?

M: On Tuesday 5 October, the Belarus newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* carried an article entitled "Milinkevich is not a Belarusian Yushchenko, but a Belarusian Havel". I do not deserve this comparison. They compare me to Havel perhaps because I am not the same type of revolutionary as Yushchenko, but instead a calmer intellectual. However, I will borrow something from Yushchenko; I will have my own Yuliya Tymoshenko.

P: Have you chosen a political partner yet?

M: Yes, I have. Ms Iryna Krasouskaya. Her husband, a businessman, had disappeared without a trace, like many others, and he was probably murdered. She is beautiful, intelligent and vivacious.

LETTERS

We are happy to respond to the questions raised by the Publisher in the Fall 2005 issue.

First, we like the present cover with the map and the table of contents, and see no reason to change it. The map is attractive and places Belarus in its comparative geographical perspective. We also prefer the table of contents on the cover, for it enables the reader to know right away the contents of the issue.

Second, BR could be published more frequently and be more widely distributed.

Third, wider distribution could be stimulated by partial translations, more original material in print and on the Internet, live seminars by the BR staff and authors--both in diaspora and in Belarus. It is important that BR in Belarusian be distributed in Belarus.

Finally, BR should use its influence with the European Commission to lobby for international broadcasts to be in Belarusian, not in Russian.

Sincerely,
Larman and Olga Wilson
Phoenix, AZ 85022

• • •

Some of our readers respond to articles about Belarus that appear in the press. Two such letters follow.

I noticed in the Belarusian Review (Fall 2005 issue) that you have a piece about Tom Stoppard's trip to Minsk. Its tone was different from that contained in his piece in The Guardian that seemed to be a naively optimistic piece about the Opposition Congress.

I sent the following letter to the editor of The Guardian.
Ethan S. Burger

Re: BELARUS IS NOT UKRAINE

Tom Stoppard's upbeat assessment of the opposition's growing power probably creates a false impression for your readership.

Mr. Lukashenka and his supports have developed electoral fraud and intimidation of the opposition to a science. Belarus is not economically stratified or ethnically stratified like Ukraine. Mr. Lukashenka is clever enough to run a jail with the door open – so individuals with pro-opposition views may move abroad (where a majority of such persons can have less impact and must remain concerned about reprisals against their families.) After the elections in Ukraine did not go as planned by the authorities last year, Mr. Lukashenka declared: "there will be no velvet, orange or banana revolution [in Belarus]." I doubt that Mr. Lukashenka is going to turn over power without a fight.

Yes, it is encouraging that the EU and the U.S. has finally taken an interest in Belarus and adopted certain limited steps to put their declarations into action. Mr. Lukashenka has over the years been propped up by Russia for geo-strategic reasons, despite Mr. Putin's dislike of the *de facto* Belarusian President. While the recent (and long delayed) willingness of the EU and US to take a more aggressive political stance towards Mr. Lukashenka is a positive development, Belarus' trade with the EU is growing. I wish I could share Mr. Stoppard's optimism, but I don't – though I would love to be wrong.

The Fall 2005 issue of Belarusian Review carried an article disputing the UN Report on Chernobyl. Los Angeles Times had an™ article on this topic. Its unquestioning acceptance of the UN report upset me enough to write the following letter to the Editor of L.A. Times.
Vitaut G. Tumash,
Reseda, CA 91335.

RE: STUDY DEPICTS A LESS DIRE CHERNOBYL

Your article shows absolutely NO FOCUS on the nearly twenty years of casualties which are actually in the tens of thousands. It unquestioningly accepts a study which is a DELIBERATE WHITEWASH by bodies which are hardly disinterested – the International Atomic Energy Agency and the governments of the affected region.

I had the upsetting experience of witnessing the health deterioration of my friend Raisa in California. She had been tending her garden in northern Ukraine in last days of April of 1986, wearing a bathing suit after what turned out to be a radioactive rainfall. Her back became covered with welts which eventually morphed into cancer. She returned to Ukraine in order to die among her immediate family.

My cousin Valery from southern Belarus visited me in California during the late eighties. I bought him a Geiger counter before his return home, so that he could check radiation levels in his food.

In the spring of 1986 the Soviet authorities were assuring their citizens in the region that the water and the local foodstuffs were safe. In the early 2000, the Belarusian dictator solved the resettlement and disability payments problems by declaring the 'zone' to be safe. Is the IAEA in 2005 interested in protecting the 'safe reputation' of nuclear energy?

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